autumn 1992

no. 1

Aufheben

Inside:
L.A. Uprising
Maastricht
Gulf War Retrospective
Earth First!
Fascism/ Anti-Fascism

£2.00

revolutionary perspectives

CONTENTS

Editorial 1

The Rebellion in Los Angeles: The Context of a Proletarian Uprising 3

Distorted by the bourgeois press, reduced to a mere 'race riot' by many on the left, the L.A. rebellion was the most serious urban uprising this century. This article seeks to grasp the full significance of these events by relating them to their context of class re-composition and capitalist restructuring.

EMUs in the Class War 17

The developing New World Order, and the power of global finance capital, is accelerating the tendency of the European capitalist class to unite politically against the proletariat. The drawbacks of this strategy for the capitalist class, however, include the loss of their flexibility in fighting the proletariat at the national level.

Lessons from the Struggle against the Gulf War 31

The slaughter by the Americans and their allies of the deserting Iraqi troops represented a defeat for the international proletariat. The article shows how class struggle militants in Britain, by positing the class war ideally rather than practically, allowed the anti-war movement to be dominated by ineffective left-liberal sentiments and tactics.

Intakes: Some Critical Notes on *Earth First!* from Within 39

Earth First! has begun to develop into a significant force within the British Green movement. We reprint an article by a dissident member who argues that its uncritical adoption of certain theoretical strands from the U.S.A. is at the expense of an understanding of capitalism and democracy.

Review: 'Fascism/Antifascism' by Jean Barrot 42

Does antifascism necessarily entail supporting one face of the state against another?

Editorial

"Theoretical criticism and practical overthrow are...inseparable activities, not in any abstract sense but as a concrete and real alteration of the concrete and real world of bourgeois society." (Karl Korsch.)

We are living in troubled and confusing times. The Bourgeois triumphalism that followed the collapse of Eastern Bloc has given way to fear and incomprehension at the return of war, nationalism and fascism to Europe.The tumultuous events of the last four years have shattered the certainties of the Cold War period. Yet for all the momentous changes that have followed on from the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, it would seem that, after more than thirteen years of Thatcherism and designer socialism, that the prospect of revolutionary change is more remote than ever. Indeed in the Cold War period the very petrified state of geo-politics actually allowed the projection of total social revolution - a real leap beyond capitalism in its Eastern and Western varieties - as the only possibility beyond the status quo. Now, however, we see the real dangers of fundamental changes and ruptures within the parameters of continuing capitalist development. Within these dangers there does lie the real possibility of the further development of the social revolutionary project. But to recognise and seize the opportunities the changing situation offers we need to arm ourselves theoretically and practically. The theoretical side of this requires a preservation and superseding of the revolutionary theory that has preceded us.

Capitalism creates its own negation in the proletariat, but the success of the proletariat in abolishing itself and capital requires theory. At the time of the first world war the theory and praxis of the classical workers' movement came close to smashing the capital relation. But it was defeated by capital using both Stalinism and social democracy. The domination of the workers movement by Stalinism and social democracy that followed was an expression of this defeat of both the theory and practise of the proletariat.

The first stirrings from the long slumber began in the fifties following the death of Stalin and with the revolts against Stalinism by East German and Hungarian workers. This rediscovery of autonomous practice by the proletariat was accompanied by a rediscovery of the high points of the theory of the classical workers movement. In particular the German and Italian left communist critiques of the Soviet Marxism, the seminal work of Lukacs and Korsch in the critique of the objectivism of Second International Marxism which Leninism has failed to go beyond.

The New Left that emerged from this process was in a sense the reemergence of a whole series of theoretical currents - council communism, class struggle and liberal versions of anarchism, Trotskyism - that had largely been submerged by Stalinism. But while a number of groups that sprung up to a large extent just regurgitated as ideology the theories they were discovering, there were some real attempts to go beyond these positions, to actually develop theory adequate to the modern conditions. The period is marked by an explosion of new ideas and possibilities. The situationists and the autonomists represent high points in this process of reflecting and expressing the needs of the movement.

The rediscovery of the proletariat's theory happened in a symbiotic relation with the rediscovery of proletarian revolutionary practice. The wildcat strikes and general refusal of work, the near revolution in France in '68, the 'counter cultural' creation of new needs by the proletariat, in total a successful attack on the Keynesian settlement that had maintained social peace since the war.

But with capital's successful use of crisis to undermine the gains of the proletarian offensive began a crisis in the ideas of the movement. The crisis was a result of the attacks on practice. We can see a number of directions in the collapse of the New Left.

One was a reformist turn: Under the mistaken notion that they were taking the struggles further - marching through the institutions - many comrades entered the Western social democratic parties. This move did not act to unify and organise the mass movements and grassroots struggles but rather encouraged and covered up the decline of these social movements. Those who avoided the mistake of being incorporated into the system fell into twin errors. On the one hand many embroiled themselves in frantic party-building. The were persuaded that the problem with the movement so far was the lack of an organisation to attack capital and the state. While they built their party the movement was breaking up. They were blind to the history of Trotskyism as the 'loyal opposition' to Stalinism.

On the other hand many of those who recognised the bankruptcy of Leninism fell into a libertarian swamp of lifestylism and total absorption in 'identity politics' etc. Meanwhile from Academia came a sophisticated attack on radical theory in the guise of radical theory. The libertarian critique of Leninism - that it is an attempt to replace one set of rulers with another set - was transformed into an attack on the very project of social revolution. While appearing in their discourse to be exceptionally radical, the political implications of the postmodernists and poststructuralists amount to at best a wet liberalism, while at worst a justification for nationalism and wars.

The collapse of the new left parallelled the retreat of the proletariat as a whole before the onslaught of capitalist restructuring. In Britain we had the debilitating affect of the 'social contract' under Labour and the exceptionally important defeat of the miners strike. Elsewhere the crushing of the Italian movement and so on.

This brings us to the present situation. The connection between the movement and ideas has been undermined. Theory and practise are split. Those who think do not act, and those who act do not think. In the universities where student struggles forced the opening of space for radical thought that space is under attack. The few decent academic Marxists are besieged in their ivory tower by the poststructuralist shock troops of neo-liberalism. Although decent work has been done in areas such as the state derivation debate there has been no real attempt apply any insights in the real world. Meanwhile out in the woods of practical politics, though we have had some notable victories recently, ideas are lacking. Many comrades, especially in Britain, are afflicted with a virulent anti-intellectualism that creates the ludicrous impression that the Trots are the ones with a grasp of theory. Others pass off conspiracy theories as a substitute for serious analysis.

We publish this journal as a contribution to the reuniting of theory and practice. *Aufheben* is a space for critical investigation which has the practical purpose of overthrowing capitalist society.

Aufheben editorial group would like to recieve articles from contributors for our **Inside** pages. Whilst we would not publish something with which we substantively disagreed, we would try and find a way to include material with which we did not agree fully should it raise issues which we consider important to debate. We would also appreciate letters. A letters page can serve as a valuable forum for debate, and would go some way towards breaking down the division between writers and readers. Artwork would also be gratefully recieved.

The Rebellion in Los Angeles:

The Context of a Proletarian Uprising

The Rebellion in Los Angeles

On April 29th, Los Angeles exploded in the most serious urban uprising in America this century. It took the federal army, the national guard and police from throughout the country three days to restore order, by which time the residents of L.A. had appropriated millions of dollars worth of goods and destroyed a billion dollars of capitalist property. Most readers will be familiar with many of the details of the rebellion. This article will attempt to make sense of the uprising by putting the events into the context of the present state of class relations in Los Angeles and America in order to see where this new militancy in the class struggle may lead.

Before the rebellion, there were two basic attitudes on the state of class struggle in America. The pessimistic view is that the American working class has been decisively defeated. This view has held that the U.S. is - in terms of the topography of the global class struggle - little more than a desert. The more optimistic view held, that despite the weakness of the traditional working class against the massive cuts in wages, what we see in the domination of the American left by single issue campaigns and 'Politically Correct' discourse is actually evidence of the vitality of the autonomous struggles of sections of the working class. The explosion of class struggle in L.A. shows the need to go beyond these one-sided views.

Contents:

1 Beyond the Image: What happened?

2 Race and Class Composition

3 Class Composition And Capitalist Restructuring

4 A Note on Architecture and the Postmodernists

5 Gangs

6 The Political Ideas of the Gangs

7 Conclusion

1 Beyond the Image

As most of our information about the rioting has come through the capitalist media, it is necessary to deal with the distorted perspective it has given. Just as in the Gulf War, the media presented an appearance of full immersion in what happened while actually constructing a falsified view of the events. While in the Gulf there was a concrete effort to disinform, in L.A. the distortion was a product not so much of censorship as much as of the total incomprehension of the bourgeois media when faced with proletarian insurrection. As Mike Davis points out, most reporters, 'merely lip-synched suburban cliches as they tramped through the ruins of lives they had no desire to understand. A violent kaleidoscope of bewildering complexity was flattened into a single, categorical scenario: legitimate black anger over the King decision hijacked by hard-core street criminals and it transformed into a maddened assault on their own community.'[1] Such a picture is far from the truth.

The beating of Rodney King in 1991 was no isolated incident and, but for the chance filming of the event, would have passed unnoticed into the pattern of racist police repression of the inner cities that characterises the present form of capitalist domination in America. But, because of the insertion of this everyday event into general public awareness the incident became emblematic. While the mainstream television audience forgot the event through the interminable court proceedings, the eyes of the residents of South Central L.A. and other inner cities remained fixed on a case that had become a focus for their anger towards the system King's beating was typical of. Across the country, but especially in L.A., there was the feeling and preparation that, **whatever the result** of the trial, the authorities were going to experience people's anger.[2] For the residents of South Central, the King incident was just a trigger. They ignored his televised appeals for an end to the uprising because it wasn't about him. The rebellion was against the constant racism on the streets and about the systematic oppression of the inner cities; it was against the everyday reality of racist American capitalism.

One media set response to similar situations has been to label them as 'race riots'. Such a compartmentalisation broke down very quickly in L.A. as indicated in *Newsweek*'s reports of the rebellion: 'Instead of enraged young black men shouting "Kill Whitey," Hispanics and even some whites - men, women and children - mingled with African-Americans. The mob's primary lust appeared to be for property, not blood. In a fiesta mood, looters grabbed for expensive consumer goods that had suddenly become "free". Better-off black as well as white and Asian-American business people all got burned.' *Newsweek* turned to an 'expert' - an urban sociologist - who tells them, 'This wasn't a race riot. It was a class riot.'[3]

Perhaps uncomfortable with this analysis they turned to 'Richard Cunningham, 19', 'a clerk with a neat goatee': "They don't care for anything. Right now they're just on a spree. They want to live the lifestyle they see people on TV living. They see people with big old houses, nice cars, all the stereo equipment they want, and now that it's free, they're gonna get it." As the sociologist told them - a class riot.

In L.A., Hispanics, blacks and some whites united against the police; the composition of the riot reflected the composition of the area. Of the first 5,000 arrests '52 per cent were poor Latinos, 10 per cent whites and only 38 per cent blacks.'[4]

Faced with such facts, the media found it impossible to make the label 'race riot' stick. They were more successful, however, in presenting what happened as random violence and as a senseless attack by people on their own community. It is not that there was no pattern to the violence, it is that the media did not like the pattern it took. Common targets were journalists and photographers, including black and Hispanic ones. Why should the rioters target the media? - 1) these scavangers gathering round the story offer a real danger of identifying participants by their photos and reports. 2) The uncomprehending deluge of coverage of the rebellion follows years of total neglect

[1] Mike Davis 'In L.A., Burning All Illusions', The Nation 1st June 1992. Davis has also produced admirable bottom up accounts of the development of the working class of L.A. and America generally that emphasizes the active role of the class struggle in shaping American society. His work particularly City of Quartz has been a major source for this article.

[2] An article on the front page of the San Francisco Examiner March 24, 1991 warned "They're lucky its been rainy and cool here because the City of Angels - stunned by the police department's beating of Rodney King - is about to explode." The explosion was held off till the verdict but it when it came the wait was worth it. Incidentaly one would have to deny the notion of certain conspiracy-minded comrades that the authorities purposely produced a not-guilty verdict to provoke the rebellion. There is no need to try and see capital's logic in an explosion of the proletariat's logic.

[3] Newsweek 11th May 1992

[4] Davis article in The Nation June 1st

of the people of South Central except their representation as criminals and drug addicts. In South Central, reporters are now being called "image looters".

But the three **fundamental** aspects to the rebellion were the refusal of representation, direct appropriation of wealth and attacks on property; the participants went about all three thoroughly.

Refusal of Representation

While the rebellion in '65 had been limited to the Watts district, in '92 the rioters circulated their struggle very effectively. Their first task was to bypass their 'representatives'. The black leadership - from local government politicians through church organisations and civil rights bureaucracy - failed in its task of controlling its community. Elsewhere in the States this strata did to a large extent succeed in channelling people's anger away from the direct action of L.A., managing to stop the spread of the rebellion. The struggle was circulated, but we can only imagine the crisis that would have ensued if the actions in other cities had reached L.A.'s intensity. Still, in L.A. both the self-appointed and elected representatives were by-passed. They cannot deliver. The rioters showed the same disrespect for their 'leaders' as did their Watts counterparts. Years of advancement by a section of blacks, their intersection of themselves as mediators between 'their' community and US capital and state, was shown as irrelevant. While community leaders tried to restrain the residents, 'gang leaders brandishing pipes, sticks and baseball bats whipped up hotheads, urging them not to trash their own neighbourhoods but to attack the richer turf to the west'.[5]

"It was too dangerous for the police to go on to the streets"
Observer May 3rd 1992

Attacks on Property

The insurgents used portable phones to monitor the police. The freeways that have done so much to divide the communities of L.A. were used by the insurgents to spread their struggle. Cars of blacks and Hispanics moved throughout a large part of the city burning their targets - commercial premises, the sites of capitalist exploitation - while at other points traffic jams formed outside Malls as their contents were liberated. As well as being the first multiethnic riot in American history, it was its first car-borne riot. The police were totally overwhelmed by the creativity and ingenuity of the rioters.

Direct Appropriation

"Looting, which instantly destroys the commodity as such, also discloses what the commodity ultimatly implies: The army, the police and the other specialized detachments of the state's monopoly of armed violence."[6] Once the rioters had got the police off the streets looting was clearly an overwhelming aspect of the insurrection. The rebellion in Los Angeles was an explosion of anger against capitalism but also an eruption of what could take its place: creativity, initiative, joy.

A middle-aged woman said: "Stealing is a sin, but this is more like a television gameshow where everyone in the audience gets to win." Davis article in *The Nation* June 1st

"Looters of all races owned the streets, storefronts and malls. Blond kids loaded their Volkswagon with stereo gear... Filipinos in a banged up old clunker stocked up on baseball mitts and sneakers. Hispanic mothers with children brow-

[5] Newsweek 11th May 1992, p. 15. In the organisation and circulation of the struggle the gangs played a significant role. This will be looked at in a later section.

[6] 'The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy' in Situationist International Anthology p. 153

sed the gaping chain drug marts and clothing stores. A few Asians were spotted as well. Where the looting at Watts had been desperate, angry, mean, the mood this time was closer to a maniac fiesta".[7]

The direct appropriation of wealth (pejorativly labelled looting) breaks the circuit of capital - Work- Wage-Consumption - and such a struggle is just as unacceptable to capital as a strike. However it is also true that, for a large section of the L.A. working class, rebellion at the level of production is impossible. From the constant awareness of a 'good life' out of reach - commodities they cannot have - to the contradiction of the simplest commodity, the use-values they need are all stamped with a price tag; they experience the contradictions of capital not at the level of alienated production but at the level of alienated consumption, not at the level of labour but at the level of the commodity.

> "A lot of people feel that it's reparations. It's what already belongs to us." Will M., former gang member, on the 'looting'. *International Herald Tribune* 8th May

It is important to grasp the importance of direct appropriation, especially for subjects such as those in L.A. who are relatively marginalised from production. This 'involves an ability to understand working-class behaviour as tending to bring about, in opposition to the law of value, a direct relationship with the social wealth that is produced. Capitalist development itself, having reached this level of class struggle, destroys the 'objective' parameters of social exchange. The proletariat can thus only recompose itself, within this level, through a material will to reappropriate to itself in *real* terms the relation to social wealth that capital has *formally* redimensioned'.[8]

If the bourgeois press had to concede the class nature of the uprising, all the stranger that a part of the left here felt it necessary to insist that what happened was a race riot. *Living Marxism* felt it necessary to reduce this eruption of class anger to their narrow conception of the 'silent race war'. The fact that the multiracial rebellion by the proletariat of L.A. was a massive explosion of class struggle escaped the notice of the RCP; but then for followers of *Living* (Dying?) *Marxism* class struggle has no existence; certainly it is not something that can be allowed to get in the way of 'the battle of ideas'. The RCP's whole stance on this and other acts of class struggle (such as the poll tax rebellion) is evidence of their retreat to the realm of ideology.

The SWP's response was more traditional. While they at least recognised the class nature of the events they did not bother to analyse the events themselves, just used them as illustrations of how their line on race and class was correct. Alex Callinicos, for example, subordinated his attempt at a serious analysis of the relation between 'Race and Class'[9] to the more urgent task of giving a rather lame defence of their ANL strategy which is obviously in deep crisis.

The RCP and SWP: mirrors of each other. What we saw in both cases was not a response to the riots - not an attempt to learn from the actions of the class - rather just the taking of them as an excuse to trot out the previously developed line. So for the RCP the uprising was a 'race riot' showing the correctness of their idea of a 'silent race war' while for the SWP it shows the validity of their ANL strategy. For both groups the significance of any outburst of class struggle is always just to show the problems of capitalism and the need for the(ir) party. The point with these and other Trotskyite groupings is that they already know what revolution is and what forms of organisation and actions it involves - it was what happened in Russia in 1917. They can only see the L.A. rebellion as evidence that their diagnosis of capitalism's sickness and their cure remain valid.

But we on the non-Leninist revolutionary left should be wary of just repeating our line that the riots were just great and that we support them whole-heartedly. It is not enough just to support the events, we should try to understand them and the development they represent.

2 Race and Class Composition

[7] Newsweek 11th May 1992, p. 16.

[8] Toni Negri 'Crises of the Planner-State: Communism and Revolutionary Organisation', in Revolution Retrieved p. 146

[9] A. Callinicos 'Race and Class' International Socialism 55

So even *Newsweek*, voice of the American bourgeoisie, conceded that what happened was not a 'race riot' but a 'class riot'. But in identifying the events as a class rebellion we do not have to deny they had 'racial' elements. The overwhelming importance of the riots was the extent to which the racial divisions in the American working class were transcended in the act of rebellion; but it would be ludicrous to say that race was absent as an issue. There were 'racial' incidents: what we need to do is see how these elements are an expression of the underlying class conflict. Some of the crowd who initiated the rebellion at the Normandie and Florence intersection went on to attack a white truck driver, Reginald Oliver Denny. The media latched on to the beating, transmitting it live to confirm suburban white fear of urban blacks. But how representative was this incident? An analysis of the deaths during the uprising shows it was not.[10] Still, we need to see how the class war is articulated in 'racial' ways.

In America generally, the ruling class has always promoted and manipulated racism, from the genocide of native Americans, through slavery, to the continuing use of ethnicity to divide the labour force. The black working class experience is to a large extent that of being pushed out of occupations by succeeding waves of immigrants. While most groups in American society on arrival at the bottom of the labour market gradually move up, blacks have constantly been leapfrogged. Moreover, the racism this involves has been a dampner on the development of class consciousness on the part of white workers.

In L.A. specifically, the inhabitants of South Central constitute some of the most excluded sectors of the working class. Capital's strategy with regards these sectors is one of repression carried out by the police - a class issue. However the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) is predominantly white and its victims massively black and Hispanic (or as P.C. discourse would have it, people of colour). Unlike in other cities, where the racist nature of the split between the included and excluded sectors is blurred by the state's success in co-opting large numbers of blacks on to the police force, in L.A. capital's racist strategy of division and containment is revealed in every encounter between the LAPD and the population - a race issue.

When the blacks and Hispanics of L.A. have been marginalised and oppressed according to their skin colour, it is not surprising that in their explosion of class anger against their oppressors they will use skin colour as a racial shorthand in identifying the enemy, just as it has been used against them. So even if the uprising had been a 'race riot', it would still have been a **class** riot. It is also important to recognise the extent to which the participants went beyond racial stereotypes. While the attacks on the police, the acts of appropriation and attacks on property were seen as proper and necessary by nearly everyone involved, there is evidence that acts of violence against individuals on the basis of their skin colour were neither typical of the rebellion nor widely supported.[11] In the context of the racist nature of L.A. class oppression, it would have been surprising if there had not been a racial element to some of the rebellion. What is surprising and gratifying is the overwhelming extent to which this was not the case, the extent to which the insurgents by-passed capital's racist strategies of control.

"A lot of people feel that in order to come together we have to sacrifice the neighbourhood."
Will M., former gang member, on the destruction of businesses. *International Herald Tribune* 8th May 1992

One form the rebellion took was a systematic assault on Korean businesses. The Koreans are on the front-line of the confrontation between capital and the residents of central L.A. - they are the face of capital for these communities. Relations between the black community and the Koreans had collapsed following the Harlins incident and its judicial result. In an argument over a $1.79 bottle of orange juice, Latasha Harlins, a 15-year old black girl, was shot in the back of the head by a Korean grocer - Soon Ja Du - who was then let off with a $500 fine and some community service. While the American State packs its Gulags with poor blacks for just trying to survive, it allows a shopkeeper to kill their children. But though this event had a strong effect on the blacks of South Central, their attack on Korean property cannot be reduced to vengeance for one incident - it was directed against the whole system of exchange. The uprising attacked capital in its form of property, not any property but the property of businesses - the institutions of

[10] The video images of white people being savaged by mobs had little to do with the way people died. At least one person, maybe two or three did die that way. More whites, however, died in fires in overblown squabbles and in misguided heroics.
In a riot thought to express anger among blacks towards whites, blacks died in greatest numbers, and mostly in black neighbourhoods. "International Herald Tribune 12/4/92

[11] As evidenced in the cases who where whites who were injured were protected and helped by black residents.

exploitation; and in the black and Hispanic areas, most of these properties and businesses were owned by Koreans. But though we should understand the resentment towards the Koreans as class-based, it is necessary to put this in the context of the overall situation. In L.A., the black working-class's position deteriorated in the late 1970s with the closure of the heavy industry, whereas at the end the sixties they had started to be employed in large numbers. This was part of the internationalization of L.A.'s economy, its insertion into the Pacific Rim centre of accumulation which also involved an influx of mainly Japanese capital into downtown redevelopment, immigration of over a million Latin Americans to take the new low-wage manufacturing jobs that replaced the jobs blacks had been employed in, and the influx of South Koreans into L.A.'s mercantile economy. Thus while Latinos offered competition for jobs, the Koreans came to represent capital to blacks. However, these racial divisions are totally contingent. Within the overall restructuring, the jobs removed from L.A. blacks were relocated to other parts of the Pacific Rim such as South Korea. The combativity of these South Korean workers shows that the petty-bourgeois role Koreans take in L.A. is but part of a wider picture in which class conflict crosses all national and ethnic divides as global finance capital dances around trying to escape its nemesis but always recreating it.

3 Class Composition and Capitalist Restructuring

The American working class is divided between waged and unwaged, blue and white collar, immigrant and citizen labour, guaranteed and unguaranteed; but as well as this, and often synonymous with these distinctions, it is divided along ethnic lines. Moreover, these divisions are real divisions in terms of power and expectations. We cannot just cover them up with a call for class unity or fatalistically believe that, until the class is united behind a Leninist party or other such vanguard, it will not be able to take on capital. *In terms of the American situation as well as with other areas of the global class conflict it is necessary to use the dynamic notion of* ***class composition***[12] *rather than a static notion of social classes.*

> "When Bush visited the area security was massive. TV networks were asked not to broadcast any of Mr Bush's visit live to keep from giving away his exact location in the area." *International Herald Tribune* 8th May 1992

The rebellion in South Central Los Angeles and the associated actions across the United States showed the presence of an antagonistic proletarian subject within American capitalism. This presence had been occluded by a double process: on the one hand, a sizeable section of American workers have had their consciousness of being proletarian - of being in antagonism to capital - obscured in a widespread identification with the idea of being 'middle-class'[13]; and on the other, for a sizeable minority, perhaps a quarter of the population, there has being their recomposition as marginalised sub-workers excluded from consideration as a part of society by the label 'underclass'.[14] The material basis for such sociological categorisations is that, on the one hand there is the increased access to 'luxury' consumption for certain 'higher' strata, while on the other there is the exclusion from anything but 'subsistence' consumption by those 'lower' strata consigned to unemployment or badly paid part-time or irregular work.[15]

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[12] 'Class Composition' is used here in a double sense to cover both the objective and technical structure of labour power and the subjective side of the needs and desires of the working class. This use of the term derives from the Autonomist Marxist tradition. Central theoretical texts can be found in Revolution Retrieved and other Red Notes publications, also Sergio Bologna's Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origin of the Workers' Council's Movement. A practical example of 'militant research' on class composition by German comrades is available in the pamphlet Class Struggles in a German Town published by Unpopular Books and AK Press.

[13] This is not purely or in the main an ideological process. The 'conservative revolution' that has been the ideological side to capitalist restructuring involves the mobolisation of a large section of the working class with the true middle class. American capital's success in cutting wages has not in the main affected this sector though in the present crisis it too is beginning to feel the pinch. This has meant the excluded sector has sufferred immensly. The perceived necessity of pitching their appeal at the 'middle class' is now accepted by both contenders for the 1992 presidential election. However the ability of capital to consolidate a consensus for the values of an 'ideological middle class' has in America, to be put in the context of mass political abstententionism by half the population including a majority of the working class.

[14] Though `underclass' is often used as a pseudonym for 'blacks' many members of other 'races' fall into this category and blacks themselves in LA and throughout America have a new 'middle class' as well as a shrinking but large proportion employed in traditional blue collar labour.

[15] But both included and excluded sections, those with expanded and those with minimal consumption are still proletarian. Why ? Because the proletariat's poverty cannot be alleviated by access to luxury goods. To be a proletarian is to be impoverished in the sense of having no ability to control one's life except in the choice of which way to submit to capital - the alien force that controls the means of production and subsistence. The difference between the strata is then, that while the poverty of the included sector is materially enriched, the poverty of the excluded has been intensified by their removal from access to social wealth.

This strategy of capital's carries risks, for while the included sector is generally kept in line by the brute force of economic relations, redoubled by the fear of falling into the excluded sector, the excluded themselves, for whom the American dream has been revealed as a nightmare, must be kept down by sheer police repression. In this repression, the war on drugs has acted as a cover for measures that increasingly contradict the 'civil rights' which bourgeois society, especially in America, has prided itself on bringing into the world.

Part of the U.S. capital's response to the Watts and other 'sixties rebellions was to give ground. To a large section of the working class revolting because its needs were not being met, capital responded with money - the form of mediation *par excellence* - trying to meet some of that pressure within the limits of capitalist control.[16] This was not maintained into the 'eighties. For example, federal aid to cities fell from $47.2 billion in 1980 to $21.7 billion in 1992. The pattern is that of the global response to the proletarian offensives of the 'sixties and 'seventies: first give way - allowing wage increases, increasing welfare spending (i.e. meeting the social needs of the proletariat) - then, when capital has consolidated its forces, the second part - restructure accumulation on a different basis - destructure knots of working class militancy, create unemployment.

In America, this strategy was on the surface more successful than in Europe. The American bourgeoisie had managed to halt the general rise in wages by selectively allowing some sectors of the working class to maintain or increase their living standards while others had theirs massively reduced. One sector in particular has felt the brunt of this strategy: the residents of the inner city who are largely black and Hispanic. The average yearly income of black high school graduates fell by 44% between 1973 and 1990, there have been severe cutbacks in social programmes and massive disinvestment. With the uprising, the American working class has shown that capital's success in isolating and screwing this section has been temporary.

The re-emergence of an active proletarian subject shows the importance, when considering the strategie of capital, of not forgetting that its restructuring is a *response* to working class power. The working class is not just an object within capital's process. It is a *subject* (or plurality of subjects), and, at the level of political class composition reached by the proletariat in the 'sixties, it undermined the process. Capital's restructuring was an attack on this class composition, an attempt to transform the subject back into an object, into labour-power.[17]

Capitalist restructuring tried to introduce fragmentation and hierarchy into a class subject which was tending towards unity (a unity that respected multilaterality). It moved production to other parts of the world (only as in Korea to export class struggle as well); it tried to break the strength of the 'mass worker' by breaking up the labour force within factories into teams and by spreading the factory to lots of small enterprises; it has also turned many wage-labourers into self-employed to make people internalise capital's dictates. In America, the fragmentation also occurred along the lines of ethnicity. Black blue-collar workers have been a driving force in working class militancy as recorded by C.L.R. James and others. For a large number of blacks and others, the new plan involved their relegation to Third World poverty levels.[18] But as Negri puts it, "marginalisation is as far as capital can go in excluding people from the circuits of production - expulsion is impossible. Isolation within the circuit of production - this is the most that capital's action of restructuration can hope to achieve."[19] When recognising the power of capital's restructuring it is necessary to affirm the fundamental place of working class struggles as the motor force of capital's development. Capital attacks a certain level of political class composition and a new level is recomposed; but this is not the creation of the perfect, pliable working class - it is only ever a *provisional recomposition* of the class on the basis of its previously attained level.

Capitalist restructuring has taken the form in Los Angeles of its insertion into the Pacific Rim pole of accumulation. Metal banging and transport industry jobs, which blacks only started moving into in the tail end of the boom in late 'sixties and the early 'seventies, have left the city, while about one million Latino immigrants have arrived, taking

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[16] It is important not to see such concessions from capital as the 'buying off of discontent'. Much of the money that flooded into the inner cities following the sixties uprisings was used to fund radical initiatives.

[17] "Thus at the level of material production, of the life process in the realm of the social - for that is what the process of production is - we find the same situation that we find in religion at the ideological level, namely the inversion of subject into object and vice versa" Karl Marx Results of the Immediate Process of Production in Pelican Capital volume one p. 990

[18] Of course the feature of deprivation within American capitalism is not new and neither is its falling disproportionally on blacks. Even at the height of the post-was boom many did not share in the 'American dream' but whereas when they revolted then, capital could respond by trying to give them money and jobs, at this period of capitalist crisis it will not be able to answer their demands in such a fashion.

[19] Negri 'Archeology and Project: The Mass Worker and the Social Worker' in Revolution Retrieved p. 215

jobs in low-wage manufacturing and labour-intensive services. The effect on the Los Angeles black community has not been homogeneous; while a sizeable section has attained guaranteed status through white-collar jobs in the public sector, the majority who were employed in the private sector in traditional working class jobs have become unemployed. It is working class youth who have fared worse, with unemployment rates of 45% in South Central.

But the recomposition of the L.A. working class has not been entirely a victory of capitalist restructuring. Capital would like this section of society to work. It would like its progressive undermining of the welfare system to make the 'underclass' go and search for jobs, any jobs anywhere. Instead, many residents survive by 'Aid to Families With Dependent Children', forcing the cost of reproducing labour power[20] on to the state, which is particularly irksome when the labour power produced is so unruly. The present consensus among bourgeois commentators is that the problem is the 'decline of the family and its values.' Capital's imperative is to re-impose its model of the family as a model of work discipline and form of reproduction (make the proles take on the cost of reproduction themselves).[21]

4 A Note on Architecture and the Postmodernists

Los Angeles as we know is the 'city of the future'. In the 'thirties the progressive vision of business interests prevailed and the L.A. streetcars - one of the best public transport systems in America - were ripped up; freeways followed. It was in Los Angeles that Adorno & Horkheimer first painted their melancholy picture of consciousness subsumed by capitalism and where Marcuse later pronounced man 'One Dimensional'. More recently, Los Angeles has been the inspiration for fashionable post-theory. Baudrillard, Derrida and other postmodernist post-structuralist scum have all visited and performed in the city. Baudrillard even found here 'utopia achieved'.[22]

The 'postmodern' celebrators of capitalism love the architecture of Los Angeles, its endless freeways and the redeveloped downtown. They write eulogies to the sublime space within the $200 a night Bonaventura hotel, but miss the destruction of public space outside. The postmodernists, though happy to extend a term from architecture to the whole of society, and even the epoch, are reluctant to extend their analysis of the architecture just an inch beneath the surface. The 'postmodern' buildings of Los Angeles have been built with an influx of mainly Japanese capital into the city. Downtown L.A. is now second only to Tokyo as a financial centre for the Pacific Rim. But the redevelopment has been at the expense of the residents of the inner city. Tom Bradley, an ex-cop and Mayor since 1975, has been a perfect black figurehead for capital's restructuring of L.A.. He has supported the massive redevelopment of downtown L.A., which has been exclusively for the benefit of business. In 1987, at the request of the Central City East Association of Businesses he ordered the destruction of the makeshift pavement camps of the homeless; there are an estimated 50,000 homeless in L.A., 10, 000 of them children. Elsewhere city planning has involved the destruction of people's homes and of working class work opportunities to make way for business development funded by Pacific Rim capital - a siege by international capital of working class Los Angeles.

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[20] Considering that we like to theorize welfare spending as a function of working class strength it should be addressed why there is an ambiguous attitude if not antipathy to welfare among many of South Central's residents. This ambivalence can be traced to the fact that, although the state is unable to completly retake the ground won by the proletariat in terms of social spending, it has been able to reorganise that welfare in capital's interest.

[21] Capital's reasoning was shown in a stark form in a Newsweek article that came out after the uprising on May 18th. In the article entitled "Yes, Something Will Work: Work" Mickey Kaus argues the problem of the 'underclass' is that upward mobility has taken the 'good workers' away so that the rest are "now isolated and freed from the restraints the black middle-class had imposed. Without jobs and role models, those left in the ghettos drifted out of the labor market." But this argues the bourgeois is only possible because welfare "enabled the underclass to form. Without welfare, those left behind in the ghetto would have had to move to where the jobs are. Without welfare, it would have been hard for single mothers to survive without forming working families." So the obvious answer is the replacement of welfare with the offer of low paying government jobs: "Single mothers (and anyone else) who needed money would not be given a check. They would be given the location of a government job site. If they showed up and worked they'd be paid for their work." The result: "True natural[!] incentives to form two-parent families would reassert themselves. But even children of single mothers would grow up in homes structured by the rhythms and discipline of work."

[22] Baudrillard America p. 75

But the postmodernists did not even have to look at this behind-the-scenes movement, for the violent nature of the development is apparent from a look at the constructions themselves. The architecture of Los Angeles is characterised by militarisation. City planning in Los Angeles is essentially a matter for the police. An overwhelming feature of the L.A. environment is the presence of security barriers, surveillance technology - the policing of space. Buildings in public use like the inner city malls and a public library are built like fortresses, surrounded by giant security walls and dotted with surveillance cameras.

DIRTY HARRY'S LIBRARY
Goodwyn Library, Hollywood

In Los Angeles, "on the bad edge of postmodernity, one observes an unprecedented tendency to merge urban design, architecture and the police apparatus in a single comprehensive security effort."[23] Just as Haussman redesigned Paris after the revolutions of 1848, building boulevards to give clear lines of fire, L.A. architects and city planners have remade L.A. since the Watts rebellion. Public space is closed, the attempt is made to kill the street as a means of killing the crowd. Such a strategy is not unique to Los Angeles but here it has reached absurd levels: the police are so desperate to 'kill the crowd' that they have taken the unprecedented step of killing the toilet.[24] Around office developments 'public' art buildings and landscaped garden 'microparks' are designed into the parking structures to allow office workers to move from car to office or shop without being exposed to the dangers of the street. The public spaces that remain are militarised, from 'bumproof' bus shelter benches to automatic sprinklers in the parks to stop people sleeping there. White middle class areas are surrounded by walls and private security. During the riots, the residents of these enclaves either fled or armed themselves and nervously waited.

We see, then, that in the States, but especially in L.A., architecture is not merely a question of aesthetics, it is used along with the police to separate the included and the excluded sections of capitalist society. But this phenomenon is by no means unique to America. Across the advanced capitalist countries we see attempts to redevelop away urban areas that have been sites of contestation. In Paris, for example, we have seen, under the flag of 'culture', the Pompidou centre built on a old working class area, as a celebration of the defeat of the '68 movement.[25] Here in Britain the whole of Docklands was taken over by a private development corporation to redevelop the area - for a while yuppie flats sprang up at ridiculous prices and the long-standing residents felt besieged in their estates by armies of private security guards. Still, we saw how that ended... Now in Germany, the urban areas previously marginalised by the Wall, such as Kreuzberg and the Potzdamer Platz, have become battlegrounds over who's needs the new Berlin will satisfy.

Of course, such observations and criticisms of the 'bad edge of postmodernity', if they fail to see the antagonism to the process and allowed themselves to be captivated by capital's dialectic, by its creation of our dystopia, could fall into mirroring the postmodernists' celebration of it. There is no need for pessimism - what the rebellion showed was that capital has not killed the crowd. Space is still contested. Just as Haussman's plans did not stop the Paris Commune, L.A. redevelopment did not stop the 1992 rebellion.

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[23] M. Davis 1990,City of Quartz p. 224

[24] Noticing a correlation between public toilets, crowds and crime, the LAPD has stopped toilets being built and closed ones that already existed. L.A. now has the lowest ratio of public toilets to people of any Western city.

[25] The postmodernists and post-structuralists like to present themselves as heirs of the movement of '68. In reality, to the extent they do relate to its ideas, they are vultures feeding on the leftovers of its radical theory and recurgitating it in forms that pose no threat to capital's survival. They are the heirs of its defeat.

5 Gangs

"In June 1988 the police easily won Police Commission approval for the issuing of flesh-ripping hollow-point ammunition: precisely the same 'dum-dum' bullets banned in warfare by the Geneva Conventions." Mike Davis (1990) *City of Quartz* p290

We cannot deny the role gangs played in the uprising.[26] The systematic nature of the rioting is directly linked to their participation and most importantly to the truce on internal fighting they called **before** the uprising. Gang members often took the lead which the rest of the proletariat followed.[27] The militancy of the gangs - their hatred of the police - flows from the unprecedented repression the youth of South Central have experienced: a level of state repression on a par with that dished out to rebellious natives by colonial forces such as that suffered by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Under the guise of gang-busting and dealing with the 'crack menace', the LAPD have launched massive 'swamp' operations; they have formed files on much of the youth of South Central and murdered lots of proletarians.

As Mike Davis put it in 1988, "the contemporary Gang scare has become an imaginary class relationship, a terrain of pseudo-knowledge and fantasy projection, a talisman."[28] The 'gang threat' has been used as an excuse to criminalise the youth of South Central L.A.[29] We should not deny the existence of the problems of crack use and inter-gang violence, but we need to see that, what has actually been a massive case of working class on working class violence, a sorry example of internalised aggression resulting from a position of frustrated needs, has been interpreted as a 'lawless threat' to justify more of the repression and oppression that created the situation in the first place. To understand recent gang warfare and the role of gangs in the rebellion we must look at the history of the gang phenomenon.

In Los Angeles, black street gangs emerged in the late 1940s primarily as a response to white racist attacks in schools and on the streets. When Nation of Islam and other black nationalist groups formed in the late 'fifties, Chief Parker of the LAPD conflated the two phenomena as a combined black menace. It was a self-fulfilling prophecy, for the repression launched against the gangs and black militants had the effect of radicalising the gangs. This politicisation reached a peak in the Watts rebellion, when, as in '92, gang members made a truce and were instrumental in the black working class success in holding off the police for four days. The truce formed in the heat of the rebellion lasted for most of the rest of the 'sixties. Many gang members joined the Black Panther Party or formed other radical political groupings. There was a general feeling that the gangs had 'joined the Revolution'.

The repression of the movement involved the FBI's COINTELPRO[30] programme and the LAPD's own red squad. The Panthers were shot on the streets and on the campuses both directly by the police and by their agents, their

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[26] And this role is certainly not being ignored by the repression. Under the direction of the FBI the forces of the American state have combined to get revenge on those responsible, i.e. the proletariat. 'A special "We Tipp" hotline invites people to inform on neighbours or acquaintances suspected of looting. Elite L.A.P.D. Metro Squad units, supported by the National Guard, sweep through the tenements in search of stolen goods, while Border Patrolmen from as far away as Texas prowl the streets.' (Mike Davis June 1st Nation article). The Immigration Service is used to summarily deport "illegals" who participated in the uprising. The idea behind the sweeping operations is to terrorise the whole population of South Central for its participation in the rebellion. But they also want to get the groups who took a lead; as the FBI officer in charge said on television, they know who was responsible for most of the attacks on property: the street gangs, and it is this section that they are trying to target.

[27] The gangs were certainly equipped to aid the uprising. Popular gang demonology would have every gang member toting an Uzi in each hand. Now, although this is certainly an exaggeration and is used by the LAPD to justify their possession and use of the most sophisticated weaponry and other equipment available to any police force anywhere (L.A. is, for example, subjected to more intensive and sophisticated helicopter surveillance than Belfast!), nonetheless the gangs are one of the most heavily armed sections of the American proletariat. It is thus interesting to note that, despite the gangs' armoury which was augmented by their systematic appropriation of gun shops they held back from killing the police. As the International Herald Tribune (12/4/92) notes, "police killed nine rioters but rioters killed no policemen." A tactical decision perhaps ? Next time...

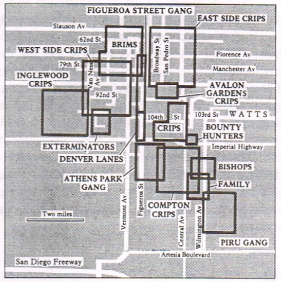
[28] In `Civil Liberties: Between the Hammer and the Rock', New Left Review 170, p39

[29] The war on the gangs is another instance of the crossing over of 'race' and class. Although the gang scare and the repression it justifies can be seen largely as the repression of South Central's youth proletariat, in the L.A. context it naturally takes racist form as when the police anti-gang operations tend to criminalise black youth irrespective of their class position.

[30] The Counter Intelligence Program, a massive FBI operation against domestic subversion using all the wartime techniques of counter-espionage - infiltration, discrediting, manipulation.

headquarters in L.A. were besieged by LAPD SWAT teams, and dissension was sown in their ranks. Although the Panthers' politics were flawed, they were an organic expression of the black proletariat's experience of American capitalism. The systematic nature of their repression shows just how dangerous they were perceived to be.

As even the L.A. times admitted[31], the recrudescence of gangs in L.A. in the early 'seventies was a direct consequence of the decimation of the more political expressions of black frustration. A new aspect of this phenomena was the prodigious spread of Crip sets which caused the other gangs to federate as the Bloods. As Davis puts it, "this was not merely a gang revival, but a radical permutation of black gang culture. The Crips, however perversely, inherited the Panther aura of fearlessness and transmitted the ideology of armed vanguardism (shorn of its program). But too often Crippin' came to represent an escalation of intra-ghetto violence to Clockwork Orange levels (murder as a status symbol, and so on)...[the Crips] achieved a 'managerial revolution' in gang organisation. If they began as a teenage substitute for the fallen Panthers, they evolved through the 1970s into a hybrid of teen cult and proto-mafia".[32]



GANG TERRITORIES – 1972

That gangs, even in their murderous mutation as 'proto-mafia' Crips and Bloods, have been an expression of the need for political organisation is indicated in a few instances where they have made political interventions. In two major situations, the Monravia riots in 1972 and the L.A. schools busing crisis of 1977-79, the Crips intervened in support of the black community. These gangs, as an expression of the proletariat, are not in the grips of a false consciousness that makes them think all there is to life is gold chains and violence. Whenever they have been given a chance to speak, for instance in December 1972 at the beginning of the transformation of the gangs into the ultra-violent Crips and Bloods, they have come out with clear political demands.[33] Every time they have been given a chance to express themselves, similar demands have been voiced. The LAPD does all in its power to stop the gangs being given a voice so as to maintain its war against them.

Still, if the gangs wanted to appeal to people's sympathies, they have done themselves no favours by dealing in crack. However, if we look closely at this we find that the mass move into this trade is pushed on them by capital. Young blacks moved into the alternative economy of drugs when traditional occupations were destroyed. We are dealing with material pressures.

For a member of South Central's youth proletariat, the only rational economic choice is to sell drugs. While the internationalization of the Los Angeles economy has meant a loss for working class blacks, what the Crips and Bloods have managed to do is insert themselves back into the circuit of international trade. While the international trade in legal commodities decided that the Los Angeles blacks were expendable another branch found them eminently useful. Southern California has taken over from Florida as the main route of entry of cocaine into the United States. When in the early 'eighties the cocaine business found the market for its product saturated, its price falling and profits threatened, it, like any other multinational, diversified and developed new products, the chief one being crack - 'the poor man's cocaine'. Young proletarians participate in this business because it is the work on offer. It is not them but capital that reduces life to survival/work. We can see, then, that selling crack is in a sense just another undesirable activity like making weapons or cigarettes that proletarians are forced to engage in.[34] But there is a significant difference. Within most occupations proletarians can organise directly within and against capital; but

[31] Los Angeles Times 23rd July 1972 quoted by Davis City of Quartz p. 298

[32] Mike Davis 1990, City of Quartz p. 299-300

[33] "The Human Relations Conference, against the advice of the police, gave a platform to sixty black gang leaders to present their grievances. To the astonishment of the officials present, the 'mad dogs' outlined an eloquent and coherent set of demands: jobs, housing, better schools, recreation facilities and community control of local institutions" Davis 1990 City of Quartz p. 300

[34] Of course, for the black youth of L.A., unlike for the C.I.A., drug dealing bears additional business costs - the risk of being killed by the police or by competing outfits.

the drug dealing gangs do not confront capital as labour. Gangs do not confront the capital of the enterprise, they confront the repressive arm of capital-in-general: the State. In fact, to the extent that the gangs engage in the cocaine trade and fit firmly into the circuit of international capital, **they are the capitalist enterprise**. This is a problem. The drive-by shootings and lethal turf wars of the black gangs is the proletariat killing itself for capital.

It is necessary to see, then, that the murderous gangbanging[35] phenomenon which is presently halted has not been, as the bourgeois press would have it, the result of the breakdown of 'family values' and the loss of the restraining influence of the middle class as they left for the suburbs; rather it resulted from: 1) the economics of capitalist restructuring (the replacing of traditional industries with drugs) and 2) the active destruction of political forms of self-organisation by state repression. The solution to the problem of the murderous crack wars is the rediscovery of political self-activity of the sort shown in the rebellion. The solution to inter-proletarian violence is proletarian violence.

The irrepressible nature of the gang-phenomenon shows the pressing **need** for organisation on the part of the youth proletariat of L.A. For a while in the 'sixties it took a self-consciously political form. When this manifestly political form of organisation was repressed, the gangs came back with a vengeance, showing that they express a real and pressing **need**. What we have seen in and since the uprising is a new politicisation of gang culture: **a return of the repressed.**

8 Political Ideas of Gangs

Since the rebellion, some attention has been given to the political ideas and proposals of the gangs (or, more precisely, the gang leadership). The proposals are mixed. Some are unobjectionable, like that for gang members with video cameras to follow the police to prevent brutality and for money for locally community controlled rebuilding of the neighbourhood; but others, like replacing welfare with workfare, and for close cooperation between the gangs and corporations, are more dubious. The political ideas from which these proposals spring seem largely to be limited to black nationalism. So how should we understand these proposals and this ideology?

The attempt by the gang leadership to interpose themselves as mediators of the ghetto has similarities to the role of unions and we should perhaps apply to them a similar critique to that which we apply to unions. It is necessary: 1) to recognise a difference between the leaders and the ordinary members 2) to recognise the role of the leadership as recuperating and channelling the demands of the rank and file.

Some of the gang leaders' conceptions are, quite apart from being reactionary, manifestly unrealistic. In the context of capitalist restructuring, the inner city ghetto and its 'underclass' is surplus to requirements - it has been written off - it has no place in capitalist strategy, except perhaps as a terror to encourage the others. It is extremely unlikely that there will be a renegotiation of the social contract to bring these subjects back into the main rhythm of capitalist development. This was to an extent possible in the 'sixties and 'seventies, but no longer.

Understandably, in the light of the main options available, there is a desire in the inhabitants of L.A. for secure unionized employment.[36] But capital has moved many industries away and they will not come back. Many of the people in these areas recognise the change and want jobs in computers and other areas of the new industries. But, although individual people from the ghetto may manage to get a job in these sectors (probably only by moving), for the vast majority this will remain a dream. Within capital's restructuring, these jobs are available to a certain section of the working class, and, while a few from the ghetto might insert themselves into that section, the attractive security of that section is founded on an overall recomposition of the proletariat that necessarily posits the existence of the marginalised 'underclass'.

But, leaving aside the change in the conditions which makes large scale investment in the inner cities very unlikely, what do the gang leaders proposals amount to ? Faced with the re-allocation of South Central residents as unguaranteed excluded objects within capital's plan of development, the gang leaders present themselves as negotiators of a new deal: they seek to present the rebellion as a $1 billion warning to American capital/state that it must bring these subjects into the fold with the gang leaders as mediators. They are saying that they accept the

[35] This term refers to inter-gang blood-letting.

[36] "The scale of pent-up demand for decent manual employment was also vividly demonstrated a few years ago when fifty thousand black and Chicano youth lined up for miles to apply for a few openings on the unionized longshore in San Pedro." Mike Davis City of Quartz 1990, p. 306

reduction of life to Work-Wage-Consumption, but that there is not enough work (!) i.e. they want the proletariat's refusal of mediation - its direct meeting of its needs - to force capital to re-insert them into the normal capitalist mediation of needs through work and the wage. The gangs, with their labour-intensive drug industry, have been operating a crypto-Keynesian employment programme; now in their plans for urban renewal the gang leadership want fully-fledged Keynesianism, with them instead of the unions as the brokers of labour-power. But, even apart from the fact that capital will not be able to deliver what the gang leaders seek, the rebellion has shown the whole American proletariat a different way of realising its needs; by collective direct action they can take back what's theirs.

These demands show the similarity of gang and union leadership: how they both act to limit the aspirations of their members to what can be met within the capitalist order. But for all the negative aspects to the union/gang organisation, we must recognise that they do originate from real needs of the proletariat: the needs for solidarity, collective defence and a sense of belongingness felt by the atomised proletarian subject. Moreover the gangs are closer to this point of origin than the sclerosed unions of advanced capitalist countries. The gang is not **the** form of organisation for blacks or other groups, but it is a form of organisation that exists, that has shown itself prepared to engage in class struggle and that has had in the past and now it seems again to have the potential for radicalising itself into a real threat to capital.

Black Nationalism

The limitations of the practical proposals of the gang leaders are partly a result of their conflict of interest with the ordinary members but also a function of the limits of their ideology. The gangs' political ideas are trapped within the limits of black nationalism.[37] But how should we view this when their practice is so obviously beyond their theory ? After all, as someone once observed, one doesn't judge the proletariat by what this or that proletarian thinks but by what it is necessary impelled to do by its historical situation. The gangs took seriously Public Enemy's Farrakhan-influenced stance on non-black businesses and 'shut em down'. Although Farrakhan does not preach violence as a political means many in the black gangs agree with his goal of black economic self-determination and saw the violence as a means towards that goal. In reality this goal of a 'black capitalism' is wrong but the means they chose were right. The tendency of separation and antagonism shown by the rebellion is absolutely correct but it needs to be an antagonism and separation from capital rather than from non-black society.It is necessary that as the marginalised sector rediscovers the organisation and political ideas that were repressed in the 'sixties and 'seventies that it goes beyond those positions.

But, just as blacks were not the only or even the majority of rioters, the Crips and Bloods are not the only gangs. Chinese, Filopinos, Vietnamese, Salvadoreans and most other Latin American immigrants have all evolved the gang as an organisational form for youth. Now just as these gangs are far less involved in the international side of the drug business - selling indigenous drugs such as marijuana, PCP and speed at much smaller profit - they also do not have the nationalist leanings of the black gangs. Before the rebellion, a level of communication was reached between black and Latino youth through the shared culture of rap music and the experience it expresses. The tentative alliance between blacks and Latinos that emerged during the uprising shows a way forward. Los Angeles and America generally does need a rainbow coalition, but not one putting faith in Jesse Jackson; rather, one from below focussing on people's needs and rejecting the mediation of the existing political system. For the blacks, a leap is required, but it will not happen through some 'battle of ideas' with the black nationalists carried out in the abstract, but only in connection with practice; only by and through struggle will the blacks of L.A. and the rest of the American proletariat develop a need for communism to which the direct appropriation of goods showed the way.

[37] In fact, within the gangs alongside the high level of class hatred there is in general such a low level of theoretical awareness that it is actually the politically advanced who adhere to this ideology.

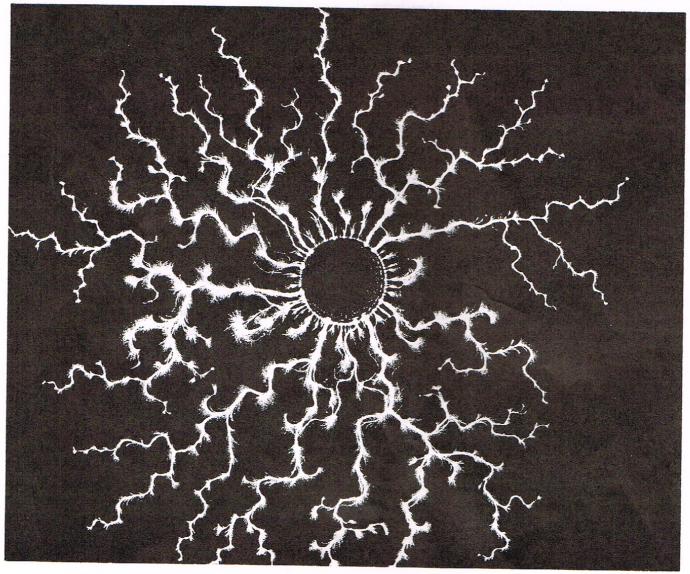
"In one crowded apartment building 75% of the tenants were found to possess looted goods and were swapping goods among themselves." LAPD Lieutenant Rick Morton *International Herald Tribune* 8th May 1992.

We might say the proletariat only sets itself the problems it can solve. Only by and through a new round of struggles such as began in L.A. will there be the opening for the American working class to find the ideas and organisational forms that it needs.

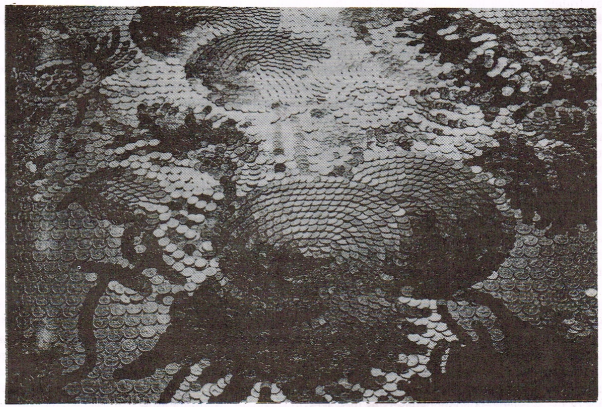
9 Conclusion

The rebellion in Los Angeles marked a leap forward in the global class struggle. In direct appropriation and an offensive against the sites of capitalist exploitation, the whole of the population of South Central felt its power. There is a need to go on. The struggle has politicised the population. The truce is fundamental - the proletariat has to stop killing itself. The LAPD is worried and are surely now considering the sort of measures they used to break the gang unity that followed the Watts rebellion. The police are scared by the truce and by the wave of politicisation which may follow it. That politicisation will have to go beyond black nationalism and the incorporative leanings of the gang leadership - another leap is required. In the multi-ethnic nature of the uprising and the solidarity actions across the country, we saw signs that the proletariat can take this leap.

For years, American rulers could let the ghetto kill itself. In May '92 its guns were turned on the oppressor. A new wave of struggle has begun.



EMUs in the class war



Despite the riots, the town hall sieges and the above all the millions who defied the law through non-payment, it was not the poll tax revolt that finally put paid to Thatcher; it was the issue of Europe. That the anti-poll tax movement was robbed of its ultimate *coup de grace* was perhaps indicative of the success of the Tories, even before the onset of the Gulf War, in making their tactical retreat from the poll tax, and perhaps demonstrates more than anything else the ultimate limitations of the anti-poll tax campaign.

Of course the spectacle of the 'palace coup' of November 1990, in which the pro-European wing of the Tory Party deposed Thatcher and swept aside her petty nationalism, was not a means to simply deny the class victory of the anti-poll tax movement - a victory that had come after so many defeats through out the 1980s and one which threatened to dispel myth of the futility of class struggle, although it did have this effect; but was the reflection of an important struggle within the British bourgeoisie. Indeed, it was only over Thatcher's dead body that British state could make its commitment to European union at MAASTRICHT a year later.

Of course the whole issue of Europe for most people in Britain seems to be both irrelevant and incomprehensible; one big yawn, in fact. Who can make sense of the interminable list of E-words; ERM, ECU, EMU, EPU etc? Who can understand the 'historic implications' of this and that treaty couched as they are in Euro-speak? Even for revolutionaries the issue of Europe is often regarded as little more than a squabble amongst the ruling class. But the whole question of European unity raised by the MAASTRICHT Treaty is part of the question of how the bourgeoisie is to organise itself against us in the New World Order which has arisen since the collapse of the state capitalism of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. Indeed, as we shall see, however indirectly, the potential class confrontation of the poll tax issue and the question Europe are linked as part of the same problem; the problem of class rule!

* * *

The Breaking of the Dam

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1988 signalled the end of the post-war era. All the old certainties of the previous forty years that had been cemented by the 'mutually assured destruction' of the confrontation between the old two super-powers have been swept away. Yet perhaps rather ironically, the very victory of the USA over its old rival has served to raise the very question of America's continued hegemony. In the old order, the threat of 'communism' had served as an overriding unifying force that consolidated the Western bloc under the leadership of the USA. Now that this threat has been vanquished, the centrifugal forces that have been building over the last 20 years as a consequence of the relative decline in the USA's economic hegemony are no longer held in check.

With the acceleration of the process of European unity and following the success of the North American Free Trade Agreement, even the most superficial of bourgeois commentators now recognises the rapidly accelerating process which is leading towards the break up of the world into three dominant and fiercely competitive economic blocs: the Pacific region led by Japan, the America's led by the USA, and Europe. It is this process towards a new tri-polarism, that has been unleashed by the collapse of the old bi-polar world, which is the basis for the development of the new world order of global capitalism. Yet the precise nature of this new tripolar world is far from certain. The relations of the various bourgeois factions both between and within these emerging blocs and their relative strengths with regard to each other and the proletariat are far from settled and indeed this is nowhere more so than in Europe.

Over the past forty years Europe, the very pivot of East-West confrontation, has been a bastion of stability in an uncertain and war ravaged world. Yet with the fall the Berlin Wall this has all changed. Both in Eastern and Western Europe we are seeing dramatic political and economic transformations as the European bourgeoisie realigns itself in the context of the emerging new world order.

We have all seen the dramatic collapse of the Eastern Bloc in Eastern Europe over the past four years, followed last year by the complete disintegration of the Soviet Union itself (and now even Russia is plagued by the threat of further disintegration into its constituent regions). We have seen the ruling classes of Eastern Europe, as they transform themselves from their old bureaucratic forms into fully fledged bourgeoisie, introduce drastic economic and political reforms in an attempt to sweep away the decrepit command structures of state capitalism. And we have seen them prostrate themselves before the envoys of international capitalism from the West and swallow whole the idiotic doctrines of the Western economic advisers as they seek to scramble aboard the New Europe. As the ruling classes of Eastern Europe no doubt know, either they open themselves up to the exploitation of Western capital and thereby hope to become a small centre of capital accumulation, or else they will be plunged into the nether regions of a newly emerging Third World of Europe.

Whereas the tectonic shifts of the New World Order are tearing Eastern Europe apart, in Western Europe they have hastened an obverse process of unification. Few but the most Euro-fanatics in 1988 would have believed that in less than four years time the Governments of the EEC would have committed themselves to abandoning their 'economic sovereignty' by accepting a single currency and a European Bank by the end of the century, with all the implications such a decision has for eventual political union in some form of United States of Europe. Yet it was such a momentous commitment that was made at MAASTRICHT last December.

Whether such a commitment will be realised is still an open question - particularly in the wake of Denmark's rejection of the original MAASTRICHT Treaty in its recent referendum. But to fully understand the importance of this commitment and the implications it has for the class struggle we must first look at the how it arose out of the decline and fall of the Old World Order of the post-war era and its effects on the political contours of Western Europe.

The Rise and Fall of the Old World Order

The Rise

It is perhaps no surprise that Europe should be at the centre of the geo-political changes brought about by the decline of the post-war era since it was through the stabilisation and division of Europe at the end of the Second World War that the world order of the past forty years was constructed. But to understand this pivotal position in the old world order and its position in the new we must recall Europe's special position in the history of capitalism.

It must be remembered that it was in Europe that capitalism first emerged and matured and it was in Europe that the industrial proletariat first emerged and became organised as an antagonistic force opposed to the domination of capital. It was the confrontation between the growing power of the organised working class and capital's ceaseless efforts to fully dominate and subsume the labour process that led to both the emergence of monopoly capitalism and the strife that tore Europe apart in the first half of this century. War, aborted revolutions, mass unemployment, fascism and yet more war plagued Europe for more than thirty long years. It was as a result of this tumultuous period that social democracy finally triumphed, establishing a truce in the class war that was to assure relative social peace in Europe for several decades and laid the basis for the post-war boom - in Western Europe at least.

The post-war settlements were made possible in Europe, as elsewhere in the industrial world of the Western Bloc, by a radical change in the mode of capital accumulation; from that of monopoly capitalism, that had been predominant since the late nineteenth century, to that of Fordism, which had first emerged in the USA during the 1920's and 30's and which became implanted in Europe following the Second World War. What then was the nature of this change in the mode of accumulation?[38]

In the face of the growing power of organised labour in the late nineteenth century, the tendencies towards the centralisation of capital had become greatly accelerated. In order to accommodate concessions made to the more organised sections of the working class the huge monopolies sought to exploit their monopoly positions by restricting production thereby raising prices and shifting the burden of higher wages onto the non-monopoly sectors of the economy.

However, high monopoly prices could only be maintained by restricting foreign competition, and the necessary restrictions on the level of production served to restrict the outlets for the further domestic accumulation of capital in the monopolised industries. As a consequence the state had to be mobilised on behalf of monopoly capital, firstly to restrict foreign competition on the domestic markets, and secondly to defend by force if necessary the opportunities for the export of capital to foreign markets. Thus monopoly capitalism could only lead towards state capitalism and intense imperialist rivalry and ultimately war, a process ably described and analysed by Bukharin and Lenin at the time.

The fundamental problem of state monopoly capitalism was that it was unable to fully realise the real subsumption of the labour process under capital since it was unable to eliminate the power of various skilled craft workers from the process of production that had developed in the key heavy industries following the industrial revolution (eg coal, steel, engineering and the railways). With Fordism, pioneered by the new consumer industries (cars, washing machines etc) and made possible by the bitter struggles of the early twentieth century, a new deal was possible. The way was opened for the real subsumption of labour to capital allowing the rapid and 'scientific' transformation of the production process in the pursuit of the production of relative surplus-value.

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[38] Here we have freely borrowed the notions of 'Fordism' and 'mode of accumulation' from what has become known as the French Regulation School {see for example Aglietta,M.}. Such categories allow us to go beyond the periodisation of capitalism into the three stages of mercantile, *laissez faire* and monoploly capitalism which then all too easily becomes reduced to the schema of an objective development of capitalism through its rise in the mercantile period, its maturity in nineteenthth century Europe and its decline and transition to socialism with monopoly capitalism. However, while the categories of the French Regulation School are more open ended, it should be noted that they too are vulnerable to a reading that denies working class subjectivity and the importance of class conflict. Indeed, it is from the French Regulation School that notions of Post-Fordism and designer socialism have arisen.

Capital's real domination of the labour process enabled a continual rise in the productivity of labour. In return for conceding its power over the labour-process, the working class could be virtually guaranteed of rising real wages within the limits of the growth in the productivity of labour. These higher wages then served to provide the demand for the ever increasing production of commodities by Fordist industry. So, whereas the old mode of accumulation had been based on restricting the supply of commodities in order to obtain monopoly prices with which to accommodate the demands of skilled and organised sections of the working class, Fordism was based on expanding production and paying for higher wages out of increased productivity. It was a mode of accumulation of mass production and mass consumption.

As has been well documented elsewhere,[39] Fordism gave rise to a major recomposition of the working class and to the emergence of the *mass worker*. The skilled craft workers of the old industries now gave way to the semi-skilled workers of the assembly line. For these mass workers, who had surrendered control over the production process as part of the 'Fordist deal', there was little or no attachment to a particular trade. Work was merely a means to a wage and no more, while the wage was the means of the imposition of an indifferent labour. As such the mass worker could be seen as the historical realisation of the tendency towards abstract labour.

The imposition of Fordism then served to underpin the social democratic class compromise at the political level. The increased production of relative surplus-value allowed the emergence of a relatively generous welfare state and the consequent rapid and unprecedented expansion of public expenditure into areas of health, housing, education and social security that provided a substantial and growing 'social wage' in the post-war era. At the same time, in most countries, various degrees of tripartite consultation (government, trade unions and employers) were instituted and developed at varying levels of society for the planning of the economy and for the co-ordination of social policy thereby giving labour-power representation within state-capital.

So while the new Fordist mode of accumulation underpinned the post-war settlement and provided the material and economic basis for limited class conciliation, the post-war settlement was consolidated at the level of the nation state. To this extent the post-war era of Fordism built upon the tendency towards state capitalism that had begun in the previous era of monopoly capitalism.

Yet the state not only policed, maintained and organised the new class compromise between the working class and the bourgeoisie, it also imposed and maintained and organised the new relations within the bourgeoisie itself.

Firstly, the old bastions of the age of monopoly capitalism were nationalised or else heavily regulated not only to diffuse the traditional class antagonisms that typified these industries, but also so that their inherent propensity towards restrictive monopoly pricing would not hold back the necessary expansionism of the newly emergent Fordist industries.[40] This gave rise to the so called 'mixed economy' of the post-war era in which an extensive public sector of state capital operated side by side with a more or less equally extensive private sector of capital. Secondly, the state sought to integrate and subordinate the money-circuits of capital to the accumulation of national productive capital through extensive regulations on financial institutions and the active application of Keynesian monetary and fiscal policy.

Capital accumulation in the post-war era therefore became consolidated around a number of distinct national economies each with its own semi-autonomous cycles of accumulation and each enjoying a limited autonomy with regard to its integration of its own working class. Fordism gave rise to the mass worker - the historical realisation of the tendency towards abstract labour - but the various post-war settlements fractured the mass worker as abstract labour on national lines. Concessions to the working class were made not to the working class as such but to the British, French, Italian or German working class - and thereby excluded those regarded as aliens such as immigrants. (This national fracturing of abstract labour of course reflected the national fracturing of capital that meant that,

[39] See for example Negri 1988, *Revolution Retrieved*

[40] The obvious example of this being the the car industry. The rapid expansion of the car industry - the Fordist industry par excellence of the immediate post-war era - required the expansion of coal, power and steel industries. These heavy industries that had been central in the old monopoly capitalist mode of accumulation faced entrenched and militant skilled workforces reluctant to accept new Fordist techniques of production yet insistent on pushing for high wages to match the steadily rising in wages in the new Fordist industries. The only profitable way out for such industries was to restrict production and thereby exploit their monopoly powers to the full. Yet such an option could only hold back the expansion, and undermine the profitability of Fordist industries such as the car industry that depended on them for their inputs. The only answer to ensure the success of the new Fordist based economy was to nationalise such industries and ensure an adequate supply to the new Fordist industries through extensive state subsidies. Later the state ownership was used to rationalise such industries and 'modernise' their working practices.

despite multi-nationals and global markets, we still can talk in terms of the interests of 'British', 'German' and 'American' capital etc.)

These distinct national economies were then inserted within the overall accumulation of capital in the Western Bloc through the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates in which each national currency was committed to a maintain a fixed parity to the dollar. Through this system of fixed exchange rates and its attendant supra-national organisations such as the IMF and World Bank each national economy was strictly subordinated to the hegemony of the USA.

The empires of the old imperialist powers of Western Europe, which had been so central to the previous era of monopoly capitalism, were rapidly broken up through the post-war process of decolonialisation as the national economies of Western Europe became integrated as the secondary pole in the Atlantic axis of accumulation. It was this Atlantic axis of *Pax Americana* which then provided the central dynamic for capital accumulation in the Western Bloc throughout the first two decades of the post-war era. While the progressive development of free trade allowed an unprecedented growth in the trade of manufactures within the Atlantic axis the ex-colonies of the Third World were increasingly left to stagnate on the peripheries.

The Fall

The post-war settlement and *Pax Americana* laid the basis for the long post-war boom of the '50s and '60s and the economic stability and prosperity that Western Europe still to a large degree enjoys. However, already by the mid-'60s its very success had begun to sow the seeds of its own demise.

Firstly, the unprecedented period of sustained economic growth of the Atlantic axis had brought with it an even faster growth in world trade, particularly that of manufactured commodities. This growth in world trade brought with it a rapid expansion in the circuits of international money-capital and the development of global capital markets. With the development of offshore banking and the Euro-dollar markets, which had emerged as means to escape state regulation, these swelling international money-circuits increasingly began to breach the constraints that had bound the movement of such money-capital to the national accumulation of productive capital and which had underpinned the efficacy of Keynesian demand management.

At the same time, the successful export of Fordism and the generous aid provided by the USA to both Europe and the far East in order to 'preserve the free world from 'Communism" had laid the foundations for the economic miracles of both West Germany, which pulled the rest of Western Europe in its train, and of Japan. As a consequence, both West Germany and Japan had by the late '60s become serious economic rivals to the USA. The growing autonomy of international money-capital combined with the relative decline of American economic hegemony increasingly put strains on the Bretton Woods systems of fixed exchange rates which finally collapsed in 1973.

However, more importantly, the post-war world order came under threat from the resurgence of class conflict. By the 1960s a new generation of the working class had grown up who had known nothing of the traumas of the early twentieth Century. A new generation fully formed within the Fordist mode of accumulation and the post-war settlement that brought with it new demands and aspirations - a new revolt of the mass worker. At their most radical these aspirations did not concern the question of who controlled the work process but constituted a revolt against work and the commodity form itself!

Against this, capital's immediate reaction was to recuperate such revolutionary demands and aspirations by making material and economic concessions that preserved the wage-relation and the commodity-form. Images of the revolution were sold back to the would-be revolutionary rebels in the form of rock music to t-shirts, the wildcat strikers were granted wage rises and more free time, while more was spent on public services and various restrictive social legislation was liberalised.

Yet while making concessions to the working class succeeded in diffusing the immediate threat to capital's very existence, it could not be a long term solution. Selling the revolution back to the would-be revolutionaries could only be a short term palliative which threatened to stimulate demands for the real thing once its inauthenticity had become apparent, while liberal reforms threatened to undermine the long term social discipline needed to ensure a productive working class. At the same time, conceding wage increases above the growth in the productivity of labour and allowing the 'social wage' to balloon out of control could only result in a serious profit squeeze.

Amongst all the diffuse complaints of the bourgeoisie concerning declining moral standards, disrespect to authority, the threat to the right to manage, it was the threat to profit, as always, that galvanised and organised their response to the resurgence of the proletariat. Indeed, the squeeze on profits caused by rising wages, combined with the rising organic composition of capital resulting from two decades of sustained capital accumulation, began to undermine the general rate of profit thus producing a serious crisis in the accumulation of capital in the Western Bloc. Capital had to take radical action.

In order to both circumvent and undermine the bastions of working class power that had become entrenched within the development of Fordism in the industrialised West, capital took up a threefold strategy of *restructuring*. In the old established industries it sought to completely re-organise and, wherever possible, to automate the existing labour process. A strategy exemplified by the automation of the Fiat production process in response to the militancy of the Italian car workers. Secondly, capital shifted into new industries, such as information technology, electronics and the so-called service sector, where fresh labour relations could be established. Thirdly, capital took flight to the more developed regions of the now long-neglected third world.

Whereas the first two forms of restructuring for the most part involved a long term commitment, capital flight offered a much more immediate response that became increasingly attractive as the crisis in Atlantic axis gathered pace. Indeed, throughout the 1970s, galvanising the emergent autonomy of international money capital, capital flooded into certain selected parts of the Third World giving rise to what became known as the newly industrialising countries (NICs). A process that was greatly accelerated following the dramatic oil price hike of 1974 which served to liquidate and then divert huge sums of capital away from industrial capital, which was committed to various national economies within the Atlantic axis, into the hands of the banks and the international circuits of money capital that owed little or no allegiance to any state.

However, this massive capital flight of the 1970s undermined the very conditions of its own realisation. Accumulation in NICs still depended on sustained accumulation in the main poles of global accumulation in the West. Yet the very flight of capital to the NICs undermined this very sustained accumulation in the West upon which its realisation depended. By the end of the decade the flight of capital, which had amounted to a virtual 'investment strike' in countries such as Britain, had precipitated a recession in all of the Western economies which necessarily brought with it a distinct downturn in world trade.

Those Third World economies that had borrowed heavily from the major banks and finance houses to finance rapid accumulation and development now found that the expected growth in exports necessary to pay for interest on such loans failed to materialise. This together with rising interest triggered the Third World debt crisis that came to dominate international finance throughout the 1980s.

Through strenuous efforts on the part of the IMF and the World Bank, backed by inter-government co-ordination amongst the industrial powers, the complete collapse of the international banking system was narrowly averted. Yet, at least for the time being, the attempt to out-flank the working class in the industrial countries through global capital flight had run up against its own inherent barriers.

But while the strategy of capital flight had run into its own insurmountable barriers it did serve to impose the new economic reality of the dominance of global finance capital and in doing so laid the ground for the further development of capital restructuring against the working class in industrialised economies. With the economic crisis of the early 1980s it became clear that economic policy had to be tailored to the demands of global money-capital.

The distinct national economies were now disintegrating as the circuits of international money-capital became increasingly autonomous from state regulation. As a consequence, government after government throughout the industrialised West began to abandon Keynesian economic policies in favour of monetarism as each tried to attract footloose international money-capital with escalating interest rates and disinflationary economic policies. As a result each government was obliged - whether socialist or conservative - to organise a concerted counter-offensive against the gains of the working class of the previous decade. Under the threat of mass unemployment, each sought to hold wages down and slash public spending on the social wage.

However, it must be said that this concerted counter-offensive against the working class in the industrialised economies has paled into insignificance compared with the onslaught on the working class in many Third World countries brought about by the solution imposed by international money-capital to the Third World debt crisis.

Escalating interest payments have meant that throughout the 1980s huge amounts of surpus-value have been transferred to the industrial economies from the Third World. Even now, after much of the Third World debt has been written off it has been calculated that the net transfer is more than $50 billion per year.

But this is only the tip of the iceberg. In order to service their debts Third World economies have been obliged to maximise their exports at all costs. As a consequence, the price of primary commodities, which make up a substantial proportion of the Third World's export earnings, have plummeted as the world market has becomes flooded by Third World economies competing with other to export. Thus even non-NICs that did not build up such massive debts during the 70s have been badly hit.

The collapse in prices for primary commodities, together with debt servicing, has involved a massive attack on working class living standards. While much of Africa is on the verge of mass starvation, the working class in countries such as Brazil and Mexico have seen their wages cut by between a third and half in real terms over the last decade.

The massive increase in the rate of exploitation in the Third World, together with the counter-offensive in the industrial economies that has resulted in a renegotiation of the post-war settlement, laid the basis for the renewed acceleration of capital accumulation in the 1980s. But as the present stagnation of the world economy shows the crisis of capital accumulation is far from being solved.

The New Economic Reality of Global Finance Capital

So, the decline of US hegemony and capital's attempt to outflank and force back the resurgent proletariat within the old Atlantic axis has led, in the past twenty years, to the emergence of the new economic reality of global finance capital and the disintegration of the distinct national economies that underpinned the Old World Order. With the disintegration of the national economies has come the decline in the efficacy of state action to regulate capital accumulation. As billions of dollars swish around the globe at the touch of button in search of ever greater profits and interest, all 'Chinese walls' are raised to the ground. All is reduced to the common standard of abstract profit. This movement of capital at its most abstract demands that all should be subordinated to the most productive of profit.

Yet the movement of abstract money-capital, for all its instantaneous freedom to roam the world, ultimately depends on the extraction of surplus-value in concrete labour-processes carried out in the context of social and political constraints. With the decline in state regulation the threat of serious dislocation, of devastating financial crashes becomes ever more probable.

In response to such dislocations we have seen the emergence of ad hoc interstate co-ordination on a global level - such as the G7 summits which bring together the major western industrial powers - so as to guide global markets back to positions coherent with economic 'fundamentals'. At the same time, we have also seen the development of the three regional blocs that have emerged in an effort to consolidate capital accumulation at a supra-national level.

However, the emergence of this new economic reality of global finance capital is still at an early stage. Its development has been held in check by two distinct factors. Firstly, the old confrontation between the USA and the USSR has meant that, despite the relative decline in USA's economic hegemony, the USA was still able and willing to play a leading role within the Western Bloc.

From the very inception of the post-war era, the 'threat of Communism' has served to mobilise the diverse fractions of the American bourgeoisie to pursue a common policy of enlightened self-interest and take an active role in regulating the conditions for the world accumulation of capital. It was this very 'threat of Communism' which mobilised the enormous Marshall Aid programme of the immediate post-war years that served to rebuild Europe. And it was this self same 'threat' that up until recently meant that the USA was prepared to exclude agriculture from its insistence on free trade, and thereby tolerate the huge subsides given to the farmers of Western Europe and Japan at the expense of the export potential of its own farmers. Such subsidies being seen as necessary to support a substantial number of conservative small farmers as a bulwark against the electoral success of the various 'Communist' and Socialist Parties in Japan and Europe.

With the collapse of the Eastern Bloc there is little except the threat of Islamic Fundamentalism to mobilise the American bourgeoisie for anything more than their most immediately apparent common self-interest. As America's negative response to the recent World Environmental Conference in Brazil and its dismal response to the crisis in the erstwhile Soviet Union clearly demonstrates, the US government is increasingly unwilling to take a leadership role in the world. The American bourgeoisie is now increasingly restricted to its own immediate self-interests, subordinating all its efforts to its growing economic competition with Japan in accordance with the dictates of the new economic reality.

The second check on the emergence of the new economic reality has been the overhang of Third World debt. The huge debts of the Third World have meant that global finance capital has been largely restricted to the industrialised West. As a consequence, the huge profit potential of countries such as Brazil have so far been left untapped. But this huge overhang of debt is being progressively wound down. This check on the movement of international finance capital, that has gone a long way in mitigating the effects on the working class in Western Europe, is beginning to be removed. A prospect that points towards an intensification of global competition, particularly between the three poles of accumulation.

With the prospect of increased global competition within the New World Order it would seem that Japan and its Pacific hinterland has a clear head start. With real investment twice as high per worker as that of both Europe and the USA, and its dynamic links with the rapidly expanding NICs of the Pacific such as Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore, the Japanese Pacific Bloc seems to be streets ahead.

But the USA and the North American Bloc is in hot pursuit. The important defeat of the American working class during the Reagan years has meant that wages over the last ten years have been cut in real terms to levels not seen since the 1950s.

Europe on the other hand has been lagging behind. Although the European bourgeoisie has been able claw back many of the gains of the working class of the previous decade and in many cases has been able to hold wages constant in real terms for most of the 1980s, it has so far failed to successfully impose Japanese style flexible labour relations nor has it been able to cut real wages to the extent that has been seen in the USA. It is in this context of the European bourgeoisie's response to the emerging new economic reality and the new world order that we must examine the question of European unity.

The Question of Europe

In the face of the growing competition from Japan and America the emerging European Bloc faces its own distinct and peculiar problems. First and foremost, Europe faces an entrenched working class that has grown accustomed to particularly generous post-war settlements. While most Western European governments have succeeded in holding down wages and introducing monetarist policies they have failed to impose large scale wage cuts like those imposed in the USA, nor have Western European managements succeeded in obtaining 'flexible labour practices' that would be on par with those obtained in Japan. Instead the Western European bourgeoisie has been obliged to tread very warily lest it awaken the wrath of its proletarian masses. A danger that has been repeatedly underlined in various instances through the 1980s: from the miners strike and the riots of 1981 and 85 in the UK, the often violent strikes by Spanish Dockers and French steel workers, the general strikes of public sector workers in Belgium and Denmark, the emergence of militant rank and file COBAS in Italy in the mid-80's, and so on.

Secondly, Europe is made up of a number of small nations, none of which has an overwhelming economic dominance. Of course the major economic power in Europe has been West Germany, but faced with the formidable economic power of France, Italy and even the UK, Germany has been unable to dominate the European pole of accumulation as the USA can that of North America or Japan that of the Pacific. In the absence of an overwhelmingly dominant state the emerging European Bloc has tended to coalesce around the supra-national organisation of the EEC. Yet this itself has caused important problems in the process of consolidating Europe as a distinct pole of accumulation. Without a single dominant state which can unify a programme and impose it on subordinated states as is the case elsewhere, the emergent European bourgeoisie has been riven by competing

nationally defined interests that have repeatedly thwarted its development as a cohesive bloc in competition with those of the USA and Japan.

Thirdly, up until the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, Europe lacked an extensive economic periphery. While the USA had central America on its borders as a source of cheap and compliant labour and Japan had the enormous populations of South East Asia, Europe was confined to relatively underpopulated and politically unstable regions of North Africa and Asia Minor.

Germany

The fall of the Eastern Bloc has, however, opened up new possibilities for Western Europe as a distinct pole of global capital accumulation and particularly for Germany's leading role within it. Ever since its unification in the 1870s Germany has been a central European power, with German capital flowing equally eastwards as it did westwards. Yet the division of both Germany and Europe following the Second World War forced West German capital into the arms of its western neighbours as West Germany became integrated into the Atlantic axis.

However, even as early as the 1970s, exploiting the *detente* between the USA and USSR, West Germany had begun to make its *rapprochement* with East Germany and Eastern Europe through the policy of Ostpolitik which led to substantial credits being made by West German banks to the governments of Eastern Europe. With the collapse of Eastern Europe, West Germany did not hesitate at the opportunity of reunification. Indeed a united Germany offered the Western German bourgeoisie a golden opportunity to break out of its impasse.

The economic reunification of Germany hinged on the exchange rate that was to be established between the West German Deutschmark (DM) and the East German Ostmark (OM). The rate eventually set was 1 DM for 2 OM, with a limited 1-to-1 exchange for private individuals. This exchange rate substantially overvalued the Ostmark - a more realistic exchange rate being somewhere between DM 1 : 4 OM to as low as 1DM to 10 OM - as the Bundesbank and other financial commentators pointed out at the time. But this was no mistake.

By overvaluing the Ostmark the German government no doubt gained temporary popularity in the east as East Germans found their savings could buy ample quantities of long coveted western consumer goods, a popularity reflected in Chancellor Kohl's triumph in the first post-unification elections. But more importantly to the German bourgeoisie an overvalued Ostmark first of all created the basis for an East German petit-bourgoisie which was necessary for the extension of a 'market economy' to the east. Those East Germans that had large savings of Ostmarks could cash them in and find they had a substantial amount of Deutschmarks that could then serve as a starting capital for a small business or to buy shares in newly privatised industries.

What is more, East Germany, even more than the rest of Eastern Europe, had a plentiful supply of cheap but educated and skilled labour. However, the working class in East Germany, as in the rest of the old Eastern Bloc, tended to be adverse to hard work: the BR ethos of 'we pretend to work and they pretend to pay us' pervaded much of its industry. By imposing an overvalued Ostmark, East German industry was made hopelessly uncompetitive. Unable to compete, East German firms would have no option but to throw millions out of work and sell out to West German capital. This short sharp shock of mass unemployment would then serve to discipline the East German working class to accept Western style work discipline.

A disciplined and cheap East German labour force would then serve as a powerful competitor to the West German working class. The entrenched power of the West German working class, indeed that of the working class of Western Europe as whole, could thereby be undercut, opening the way for substantial cuts in both the private and the social wage to match the competitive edge of both Japan and the USA.

Indeed such a strategy would have established the newly unified Germany as the economic power in Europe and would have gone a long way in overcoming the problems of the consolidation of the European pole of global capital accumulation. However, the strategy has gone awry. The attempt to impose the short sharp shock on the East German working class was met by a wave of strikes and demonstrations. Faced with mass social unrest, the German government was forced to back down and concede commitments to raise East German wage levels to West German levels within less than three years and has repeatedly been obliged to extend employment support schemes. Although the German government has been able to sweep away various food and rent subsidies to the East German working class the 'cost of unification' imposed by working class resistance have been 'far higher than expected'.

The German government has sought to shift these costs onto the West German working class by restricting wage increases, but again, in the face of mass public and private sector strikes this spring, they have been obliged to back down. The promise of German unification is rapidly turning into a nightmare for the German bourgeoisie.

France, Italy and the rest of the EEC.

The threat of the emergence of a Greater Germany following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent process of German unification, greatly alarmed the other continental powers in Western Europe and the EEC. Fearing that the new Germany would break free of the EEC in order to establish itself as the central European power economically dominating the whole of Europe, both East and West, the other continental states of the EEC hastened to commit Germany to the process of economic and eventual political unification of Western Europe.

Although accelerating the process of unification meant that the rest of the EEC had to make important concessions to Germany as to the structure of the EEC and the exemplary role of the Bundesbank in monetary policy, it was clearly better to become subordinated to the dictates of Germany through the structure of the EEC where various governments would retain a say, rather than be subordinated *de facto* by Germany's growing economic might. This was particularly true for the more peripheral economies such as those of Portugal, Ireland, Spain and Greece.

The emergence of a unified market and eventually a single European currency could only unleash a process of concentration and centralisation of capital that would lead to an economic polarisation between the rich and poor regions of Europe; but if such a process was instituted politically through the EEC then it would necessarily involve compensatory financial transfers to the poorer nations. If, on the other hand, the Deutschmark eventually was allowed to became the *de facto* single currency then there would be no such compensation. The weaker EEC states would be left to their own fate on the verge of a newly emergent Third World of Europe.

So, faced with the prospect of being overwhelmed by the growing competition from Japan and America and faced with the new realities of both the dominance of international money-capital and the post-Cold War world the Western European governments had little choice but to accept the imperative for economic unification. What is more, the fear on the part of most of those governments within the EEC of the implications of a unified Germany impressed upon them the importance of EEC as the political vehicle for such economic unification. Hence the acceleration of the process of European unification through the EEC that we have seen in the last few years culminating with the MAASTRICHT Treaty last year.

However, the breakneck speed with which the EEC is now heading towards economic unification has served to raise serious questions amongst many within the European bourgeoisie who are now having to face up to its implications. The 'convergence conditions' of the MAASTRICHT Treaty has committed the bourgeoisie of the EEC to take a hard and resolute line in the face of European proletariat. If they are not to be left behind in the process of European unification, the signatories of the MAASTRICHT Treaty are committed to meet strict and onerous monetary targets. These targets demand that public spending should not exceed 3% of each economies GDP, that the total National Debt should not exceed 60% of GDP and that inflation should be brought with a couple of percentage points of the lowest in the EEC. All of which imply for most economies of the EEC severe cuts in the social wage and strenuous efforts in holding down wage levels. Hence, in the absence of a world-wide economic boom, the resolute commitment to these 'convergence conditions' can only lead to an outright confrontation with the working class throughout most of the EEC.[41]

Yet, at the same time, such a commitment to these convergence conditions, and indeed eventual monetary union, both removes the economic flexibility each individual government has in diffusing class confrontation, and serves to undermine nationalist sentiment that has proved such an important element in maintaining social cohesion in Europe for more than hundred years. Let us briefly consider these two important implications in turn.

Under the old Keynesian policy regime, governments could always defuse particular class confrontations by relaxing monetary and fiscal policies and maintain international competitiveness through a subsequent devaluation of the currency. In this way the bourgeoisie was always able to make a tactical retreat if the going got too tough in the hope that any concession could be clawed back at a later date. (Of course this always held the danger that a series of 'tactical retreats' would turn into a full scale rout, as it threatened to do frequently in the '70s.)

[41] Already we have seen strikes and mass demonstrations in Spain Holland, Italy and France against austerity measures drawn up by governments in the wake of MAASTRICHT.

In establishing the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in the late seventies, most EEC governments committed themselves to taking a tough and unified stance by tying the exchange rate of their currencies to the Deutschmark and allowing only occasional realignments within the ERM. Following the MAASTRICHT Treaty, not only is devaluation increasingly ruled out even in the most exceptional circumstances - eventually becoming impossible with the introduction of the single currency at the end of the century - but fiscal and monetary policy are to be increasingly circumscribed by the need to meet its various 'convergence conditions'. Hence, with the MAASTRICHT Treaty, the governments of the EEC are now committed to progressively surrendering their flexibility and room for manoeuvre - their 'political sovereignty' - in their confrontations with the working class.

But many in the European bourgeoisie not only fear that the commitment to a hard and unified stance against the proletariat will restrict their room for manoeuvre and prove not only a hard but brittle unity, but that the MAASTRICHT Treaty will ultimately rob them of the most effective weapon - nationalism. As Nicholas Ridley revealed most clearly in his outburst against the Germans, what many of the bourgeoisie fear is that while the working class may accept austerity measures imposed by their 'own' ruling class 'for the sake of the nation' that has been long and painfully constructed over more than a hundred years, they are less likely to go along with austerity measures that originate from Brussels or the Bundesbank.

This fear is shared by both the Left and Right of the bourgeois political spectrum and has led to increasing opposition to the MAASTRICHT Treaty and the present course of European unification. In the face of accelerated European unification and its threat to 'national sovereignty and identity' the Right has mobilised nationalist sentiment. A mobilisation that has become most apparent with the rise of the far Right parties in Germany and France, and which has no doubt drawn strength from the fears of many working class people with the undermining of the nationally defined post-war settlements.

While the Right is opposed to the MAASTRICHT Treaty because it sees European unity as undermining the working class identity with its 'own' bourgeoisie through the nation, the Left oppose the MAASTRICHT Treaty on the grounds that it merely lays the basis for a bankers Europe run by bankers. For them, what is needed is the construction of a new European identity, perhaps buttressed by various sub-national identities (eg of the Scotland in Europe ilk), that can appeal to working class loyalties, built on filling the 'democratic deficit' (greater powers to the European parliament) and a European social settlement (eg through the strengthening of the social chapter). In other words, what they demand is a bankers Europe run by a new European intelligensia.

Britain

These divisions in the west European bourgeoisie are reflected in British ruling class circles, as is evident in the deep divisions within both the Tory and Labour Parties over the issue of Europe. But these divisions are further complicated by the peculiarity of Britain's position.

The British bourgeoisie have always maintained an aloof and detached attitude towards the rest of Europe. The legacy of being the first industrial capitalist power, which gave Britain hegemony over the world market throughout much of the last century, has left the British bourgeoisie with a distinctly global outlook and interests. Yet to understand the present divisions within the British bourgeoisie over Europe we must briefly reconsider the last 40 years with respect to Britain.

Unlike much of mainland Europe, Britain did not experience the devastating dislocations brought about by invasion and modern warfare on its soil. As a consequence it was far more difficult to sweep away many of the old pre-war social relations and institutional structures to make way for the post-war reconstruction around Fordism and social democracy. This had important implications for the development of Britain in the post-war era.

This not only meant the preservation of antiquated traditions and culture in social life, but that at the point of production many of the old restrictive practices that had built up over previous decades of monopoly capitalism remained intact and even incorporated into the new Fordist industries. While there emerged distinct move towards a Fordist style national collective bargaining in most industries, which was conducted on behalf of the workers by professional trade union officials, shop-stewards at a plant level still retained an extensive role in negotiating piece rates, the maintenance of particular working practices, and lines of demarcation, which served to restrict the full development of Fordist control of production.

Unwilling to confront the entrenched power of the shop stewards, British capitalists tended to invest abroad wherever possible, leaving British industry with increasingly antiquated and uncompetitive plant and machinery. A response that led to the continuing decline of Britain as an industrial power through the post-war decades.

It was such peculiarities of post-war Britain which gave form to the particular expressions of the proletarian offensive of the 60's and 70's in this country. On the one hand there emerged the distinctly cultural 'youth revolt' against the 'quaint' yet stifling Victorianism that dominated British life and culture. A revolt that, unlike elsewhere in Europe, was largely separated from the questions of class and the economy. On the other hand there was the resurgence in the militancy of the shop stewards movement that was very much of the 'economic' and which found its expression in wave after wave of wildcat strikes and 'secondary "sympathy" actions'.

This overt separation of the largely cultural 'youth revolt' from the economic struggle at on the shop floor meant that the proletarian offensive was far less explosive in Britain than it was to prove to be in for example France and Italy, where the politicisation went much further resulting in the events of May '68 and the 'Hot Autumn' of '69 respectively. Yet while it was relatively easy for the British state and capital to contain the proletarian revolt within the limits of the commodity and the wage relation it could only do so by accelerating Britain's economic decline. This reached crisis point by the end of the 1970s.

The 'winter of discontent' of '78/'79 brought home to the British ruling classes more than anything else the precarious state of the British economy beset by the 'English disease' of 'bloody minded workers' that had made Britain the 'sick man of Europe'. The policy of the Labour government, which had successfully defused the class confrontations of the early '70s and, like other governments of Western Europe, had begun cautiously, and rather reluctantly, to adopt monetarist policies in an effort to claw back the gains made by the working class in the previous decade without at the same time destroying the social consensus, had now come to a dead end. It had become clear that if Britain was to remain a major area of capital accumulation far more radical action had to be taken than that being pursued elsewhere in Western Europe. The election of Thatcher in 1979 cleared the way for such radical action.

Rallying the bourgeoisie behind her, Thatcher began a sustained offensive against the working class. Armed with mass unemployment exacerbated by high interest rates and a grossly overvalued pound, Thatcher took on and defeated various sections of the working class one by one. The steel workers, the health workers, the railway workers, the miners, the printers; each victory served to galvanise the bourgeoisie to sweep away the restrictions on management and ruthlessly impose redundancies and new working practices. As a result the overmanning and restrictive practices that had constrained the profitablity of British industry for decades were swept away during the 1980s.

Thatcher's strategy of uncompromising confrontation was undoubtedly a highly risky one for the British bourgeoisie, and more than once it nearly came a cropper. Indeed, following the riots of July '81 and an impending miners strike it was only by playing the ultimate card of jingoistic nationalism with the Falklands war that Thatcher kept on course in her first term (an episode that was to underline the importance of nationalism in the minds of many of the British bourgeoisie); while despite five years preparation Thatcher's victory over the miners in '84 was far from certain.

Yet the success of Thatcher's counter-offensive fed on itself. The sweeping away of restrictive practices etc allowed a massive increase in the intensity of labour. This meant that capitalists could extract more surplus-value, and thus higher profits, while at the same time as conceding higher wages. As a consequence, for those that escaped the advance of mass unemployment and the low wage economy, wages have far outstripped prices throughout the 1980s. This, combined with income tax cuts and easy credit has allowed the Tories to divide the working class and thereby build a new conservative social consensus built around the infamous 'Essex Man'. A consensus that has ensured the continuing electoral success of the Tory Party.

Such was the success of the Thatcher's strategy that in the euphoria of her third election victory and in the midst of the first flush of the late '80s yuppie boom, the Tories became convinced that they could maintain, if not accelerate the momentum of the Thatcher counter-offensive almost indefinetly. They believed that they could continue to push back the working class and repeatedly re-negotiate the post-war settlement so as to eventually Americanise British society and Japanify production. As a consequence they were confident that Britain would become the land of ever rising profits and, given that the big bang had reaffirmed London as the third pillar in the world of international finance, Britain could compete with the best in the world as a centre for capital accumulation.

This confidence shaped the Tory Party's attitude to Europe at the crucial time of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Thatcher was happy to see freer markets, particularly if they could be broadened to Eastern Europe, but was opposed to any move towards economic or political unification that would inhibit the momentum of her counter-offensive. She was resolutely opposed, as she repeatedly made clear, to 'socialism through the back door' that would impose the timidity of the European bourgeoisie on her policies for Britain. The Tory government therefore sought to stall any moves towards EEC unification.

However, Thatcher's semi-detached attitude towards Europe was to become increasingly untenable for all but the most fanatical of Thatcherites. Facing the stampede towards European unity which followed the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the British state soon found itself being forced to choose between being left behind on the margins of the new Europe or else making a commitment to its process of unity. Increasingly isolated and unable to stall or dilute European unification, Thatcher's preferred option was to go it alone and preserve 'Britain's sovereignty' so as to press ahead with her Americanisation and Japanification.

Yet such an option now looked increasingly unpalatable. Commentators on the Left of the British bourgeoisie had long pointed out that the cost of Thatcher's success had been the decimation of Britain's manufacturing base and a failure to reverse the chronic lack of real investment in plant and machinery. This weakness in the British economy soon became evident with the dramatic rise in the balance of payments deficit that accompanied the late '80s boom. For the first time in a hundred years Britain's balance of trade in manufactures went into the red. At the same time the great stock market crash of 1987 reminded all of the perilous nature of the high seas of international finance on which Thatcher had hoped to sail single-handedly.

With Thatcher's economic 'miracle' increasingly being revealed as a 'mirage', the government was forced to seek the protection of the Europe. To avoid escalating interest rates and to bolster international financiers confidence in Britain the Tory government was eventually obliged to seek to the protection of the EEC by joining the 'Exchange Rate Mechanism' - much to Maggie's chagrin.

But what more than anything else sunk Thatcher's counter-offensive was working class resistance. Within weeks of the triumphant celebrations of ten years of Tory rule which proclaimed the lowest level of strikes for fifty years came the wave of public sector strikes of the Summer of '89. London was repeatedly brought to a halt by wildcat strikes by underground workers and industrial action on the buses, oil production was disrupted by wildcat strikes by offshore oil workers, solid one-day strikes on British Rail were then followed by more than a million local government workers coming out on successive one-day strikes throughout the country.

While these strikes did not result in major victories over the government, they did not result in a major defeats either. If nothing else they began to undermine the apparent invincibility of the Thatcher regime. Indeed it was only through a long and perhaps pyrrhic victory over the ambulance drivers six months later that the government was able to regain its hardline reputation and restore some of the confidence of international capital. But no sooner had it done so than it had to face the emergence of the campaign against the poll tax.

The mass campaign against the poll tax, which exploded into the civil disorder of March 1990 and the biggest movement of civil disobedience ever seen in the UK, finally made it clear to the British ruling class that the momentum of the Thatcher counter-revolution could not be maintained. There was little option but to back off and slow down. As a consequence the policy of making Britain an offshore haven of profitablity outside mainstream Europe was no longer appeared as feasible. As the Europhiles in the both the Tory Party and the Labour Party made clear, the British bourgeoisie had no option but to sink or swim with its counterparts in European Community. For all her great service to the British bourgeoisie Thatcher had to be dumped.

Conclusion

The dilemma facing the British state is now the dilemma facing the bourgeoisie over Europe as a whole - it is the question of organising class rule in the New World Order and within the new economic reality of global finance capital. A dilemma made all the more acute by the current world economic recession that is threatening to turn into a full scale economic slump.

While Norman Lamont waits for Godot, in the form of an economic recovery that never comes, and while the more idiotic backbench Tories dream of Britain overhauling Germany as the economic anchor of Europe with the eventual realisation of zero inflation, more and more of the British bourgeoisie are becoming alarmed at the prospect of prolonged stagnation or even of a full scale economic slump. With the pound locked into the ERM and the Government committed to European economic convergence the British bourgeoisie face the continued world economic stagnation with little room for manoeuvre.

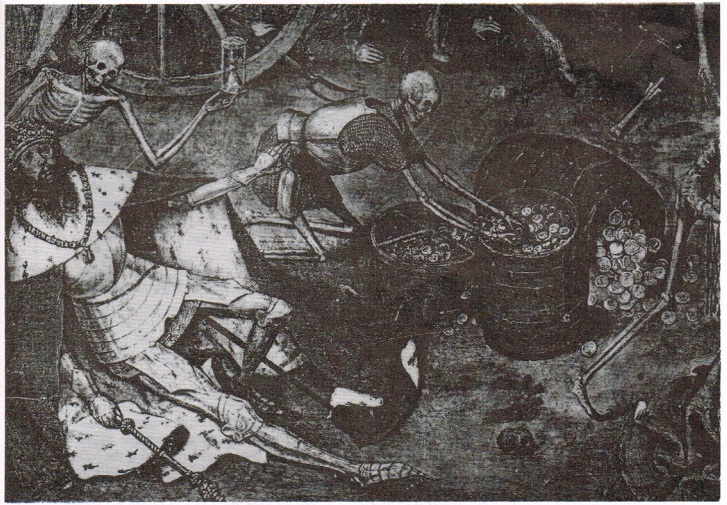
With the devaluation of the pound ruled out and interest rates dictated by the Bundesbank both the government and British capitalists are being driven towards a full scale confrontation with the British working class. Industrial capitalists face increased foreign competition handicapped by an overvalued pound and crippled by extortionate real interest rates, and as a result are being forced to hold wages down by throwing thousands onto the dole. Consequently the government faces an exploding budget deficit.

Indeed, at the time of the election last March, the government forecast an alarmingly sharp rise in the annual budget deficit to around £30 billion (5%-6% of GDP), and roundly denounced the Labour Party's modest, if not pathetic, proposals to add a few extra billion to public spending as wildly profligate. Yet such forecasts were based on the rosy assumptions of an imminent economic recovery. Four months later such assumptions have become laughable. With the prospect of a continuing decline in tax revenues and rising social security payments due to the prolonged economic recession, most economic forecasters are now predicting the budget deficit to rise to at least £40 billion (7%-8% of GDP) on current trends! If the Government is to contain its budget deficit to a level that it can confidently finance, let alone reduce it to the levels demanded by the MAASTRICHT convergence conditions for EMU, then it has no option other than to make further substantial cuts to public spending, and may even have to raise taxes despite all its election promises.

Meanwhile, Major's attempt to salvage the new social consenus that Thatcher built around the dream of the 'property owning democracy' is beginning to flounder. The hope of reducing interest rates, and thus mortgage rates, has run aground against the Bundesbank's insistence on tight monetary policies. With falling house prices, restricted wage increases and rising unemployment there will be little respite in the mounting number of house repossessions in the coming year or so. The 'property owning democracy' has turned into a nightmare for increasing numbers of working class people and nice Mr Major's assurances of a new dawn are now being revealed as all too false[42].

The next few years will therefore be a testing time for both the government and the British bourgeoisie. With their room for manoeuvre restricted much will depend on the reaction of the working class to the coming wave of attacks. However, what has become clear following the anti-poll tax campaign is how weak the Labour Party has become as a means of both controlling and containing class conflict. Outside of Scotland and its few remaining strongholds in the cities of northern England and Wales, the Labour Party has lost all connection with the working class. Indeed, it is rapidly becoming a party of the middle class, a process that can only accelerate under the leadership of John Smith. In transforming itself into a 'modern social democratic party' on the European model, and as such fully committed to the bankers' Europe of Delors, the Labour Party has as little hope of controlling future social unrest as the French Socialist and Communist Parties had in controlling the recent lorry drivers blockades!

[42] As was noted by the *Sunday Telegraph*, the recent three days of rioting on the Hartcliffe estate in Bristol did not occur in a 'problem estate', which has become the norm in the sporadic rioting of recent years, but in a council estate which was, until recently, relatively well off, with more than 50% of the houses owner occupied. While the discontent is still very much confined to the youth,its spread is an ominous sign for the bourgeoisie.



Lessons From The Struggle Against The Gulf War

A new cycle of working class struggle is tentatively emerging in continental Europe over austerity measures required by the Maastricht Treaty. But here in Britain any optimistic anticipation of the prospect of struggles is tempered by the shadow of a recent defeat. For since the historic and inspirational turning point of the poll tax rebellion, the resurrection of autonomous and uncompromised class hatred in Trafalgar Square and the mass refusal of austerity, has come the defeat of the anti-war movement. The Gulf War may not have had an effect on the working class's ability to wage defensive struggles in response to coming offensives, but the revolutionary Left have still to come to terms with our failure to prevent the successful slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi proletarians. It is as if the blood of those thousands of Iraqi mutineers and deserters carpet-bombed on the road to Basra is somehow on our hands; the anti-war resistance in Iraq was so successful it rendered the Iraqi state incapable of defending its gains in Kuwait at all, while the impotence of the anti-war movement in the US and Britain virtually gave the murderous representatives of US/UK capital *carte blanche* to have Iraq bombed back into the Middle Ages.

In order to exorcise the ghost of this defeat we have to undertake a critical reappraisal of where the anti-war movement went wrong. Moreover, we have to reassess our own attempts to prevent the war and how we influenced the strategy pursued by the anti-war movement as a whole. It is not enough to say, as many who confined their opposition to grumbling over their pints must have done, that the outcome was inevitable, that the war couldn't be

prevented, that we could never defeat the forces of war, backed by the UN, the police forces and the media. The Vietnam war is a recent enough reminder of how a seemingly omnipotent war-machine can be rendered impotent by concerted opposition amongst soldiers and the class from which they are drawn. And right up until the commencement of Operation Desert Storm, despite the propaganda which accompanied Operation Desert Shield and the lack of any effective redress to it by the anti-war movement, opinion polls suggested that around 50% of the population were opposed to military intervention. Not a bad foundation from which to build an active and effective opposition.

Our failure was not inevitable. Nor can it be solely blamed on the left-liberal leadership of the anti-war movement, for their success in controlling the movement reflected our inability to mount a successful challenge to the leadership, their positions, and most of all, their strategy. So, we have to look at our own role in resisting the war, what we did right and wrong, the strengths and weaknesses of our strategy.

Anti-war Strategy

The experience of our class has shown us how capitalist wars can be effectively opposed. For the sake of analytical clarity this opposition may be divided into three separate strategies which are in reality particular yet inter-related aspects of the overall struggle. These may be roughly defined as:

i) undermining support for the war by stressing the class antagonisms involved;
ii) actively sabotaging the state's ability to conduct a war and;
iii) precipitating a crisis 'at home'.

Let us consider these in turn.

i) Undermining the notion of a national interest.

The war in the Gulf has served to decimate a once combative oil producing proletariat, to reassert the role of the US as global policeman in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, and also to stimulate another round of capital accumulation based on military procurement. These results may well have been considered during the build up to the war, and could have been factors in deciding to pursue the aims of the Allies by military means rather than through sanctions. But the primary aim of the Allies was to resecure the flow of Kuwaiti oil revenue into the US and UK banking systems, essential for the financing of the US deficit. In other words, the war was fought for the interests of US and UK capital, for their need of injections of finance capital from Kuwait, which have amounted to $60 billion invested in the US alone.

On the other hand, it was to be the working class who would be made to pay the price for the war. The refusal of Iraqi troops to fight was not anticipated, so casualties amongst British as well as Iraqi troops were expected. On top of the despair of the families from whom they would have been taken, the working class as a whole was expected to suffer as NHS wards were to be denied to us in order to treat the troops. As it was, patients had operations cancelled in preparation for this eventuality.

Although the financial costs of the war have been largely recovered through reluctant contributions from Japan and Germany and other oil states such as Dubai, UAE etc, and the massive profits from subsequent arms sales to the region, the costs were always liable to be foisted onto the shoulders of the working class through higher taxes, cuts in public services, and price rises. The government also hoped for another 'Falklands' Factor', rallying a nation divided over the poll tax behind the flag of the bourgeoisie.

In order to successfully oppose the war it was crucial that the anti-war movement stress that the war was to be fought for the interests of the capitalist class alone, and to decisively situate itself in opposition to those interests. This could be done through the usual means of propaganda such as leaflets, banners, graffiti, fly-posting, public meetings, and through high profile actions.

Not only is this essential for building an opposition at home that knows why it opposes the war and can thus formulate tactics such as strikes and civil disorder which reflect the class basis of that opposition, but it is also essential to encourage 'disloyalty' amongst those troops expected to fight. Historical examples abound of desertions and mutinies making it impossible for rival capitalist interests to compete by means of war, not least in Vietnam where US troops were often more inclined to kill their officers than the supposed enemy[43]. And there is evidence to indicate that a concerted refusal to fight in the Gulf War was not an impossibility. Even without the social unrest

[43] Eds' note: A short account of the quasi-mutiny by US troops in the Vietnam War is contained in the US-produced leaflet "The Persian Gulf War-A One Way Ticket To Atlantis", available from *Aufheben* for a SAE.

'back home' that formed the backdrop to resistance in Vietnam, many troops refused to go to the Gulf, including at least 23 of the US's elite force, The Marines, who are currently in jail for desertion. There were also cases of warships *en route*

to the Gulf being sabotaged . And Bush showed that he did not have absolute confidence in the loyalty of the US army when ammunition was taken away from all enlisted men and women on bases he visited during 'morale raising' trips to Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Shield.

Examples of this strategy were seen in Germany, both during the build-up to war and once it had started. In August of 1990 a live TV show debating the Gulf crisis was disrupted by anti-war protesters with a banner reading: "**There's always German money in weapons when there's any slaughter in the world.**" And on January 21st 1991, anti-war protesters attempted to make clear in whose interest the war was being fought by blockading the entrance to the Frankfurt stock exchange and pelting the dealers with eggs and paint bombs.

ii) Sabotaging the war machine.

Fighting a war is huge logistical exercise requiring the coordinated movements of troops, weapons, ammunition, and supplies from wherever they are stationed to wherever they are required. The ability of military commands to perform this operation is clearly dependent on a number of factors, including the reliability of those workers not required to fight but who are nonetheless essential for this logistical exercise, and if cooperative themselves, on their ability to function without interference. This presents many opportunities for sabotaging the war effort, and indeed there were a number of instances of such sabotage against the Gulf War. For example in August 1990, 4000 maintenance workers on US bases in Turkey went on strike for higher pay, thus deliberately hampering the war effort. And in France in September 1990, workers held up a ferry carrying troops to the Gulf, albeit for only 12 hours. In Italy there were attempts to blockade Malpanese airport near Milan in order to prevent it from being used to refuel USAF B-52's *en route* between bombing raids in Iraq and British bases.

In Germany frequent attempts were made to blockade military depots and barracks in order to disrupt the mobilisation for the war. Transport command supplies were also blocked, holding up the movement of the raw materials for the military bases of the British and American troops stationed in Munster, Bremerhaven, Frankfurt, Berlin and elsewhere. The tactic of disrupting the transportation of military supplies was also used in France on several occasions, and in Holland, where trains supplying troops in Germany were persistently sabotaged, derailed, and blockaded.

iii)Fermenting Crisis at Home.

The backdrop to the end of the Vietnam War, a result of the refusal of American conscripts to fight for their state, was a severe social crisis in the United States and Western Europe. One of the ways in which that crisis manifested itself was through civil disorder in opposition to the war in Vietnam. Footage of the riot in Grosvenor Square may look like a Keystone Cops movie compared with what Britain has seen in the last decade or so, but it was nevertheless an important moment in the international crisis which led the US State to pull out of Vietnam and confront the crisis it was suffering in its factories, streets, campuses and ghettoes.

Again, examples of this strategy were seen in opposition to the Gulf War. General strikes occurred in Pakistan, Italy, Turkey and Spain, although they seem to have been successfully restricted to one day only by union bureaucracies. A token 1/2 hour stoppage against the war occurred on January 18th 1991 at a firm in Bremen, Germany, and later that month, also in Germany, draft resisters forced to work as hospital orderlies went on a 3-day strike in opposition to the war.

Demonstrations against the war occurred virtually everywhere imaginable. And some of these, although not enough, spilled over into direct confrontations with the forces of the state. For example, in Bangladesh, police were forced to use batons to contain demonstrators on September 3rd 1990.

Waging Class War against the Bosses War.....

It can be seen from the above outline that there were a number of attempts, using various strategies, to wage the class war in continental Europe against the inter-capitalist war in the Gulf. One could no doubt find many other instances of anti-war resistance abroad if one was determined to search beyond these few examples which, despite a

virtual media blackout on such activity, were available to the anti-war movement thanks to *War Report*, *Counter Information* , and a leaflet by *B.M. Combustion* [44].

One could criticize many of the actions which occurred as tokenistic, such as the one day strikes. But the point is that these actions, whether limited or exemplary, could never succeed in stopping the war unless they spread beyond those countries whose involvement in the war was relatively minor. Stopping the war meant that the class war against the Gulf war had to be taken up in those countries central to the UN backed coalition: the US and the UK.

.....Or not as the case may be

Early signs from the US were encouraging. On the 20th October 1990, 15,000 marched in New York and there were demonstrations in 15 other major cities. And US activists appeared willing and able to take direct action. A San Francisco TV station was disrupted, a cop car set alight on a demo, and the Golden Gate Bridge was blockaded on several occasions. These actions were not generalised however, and it appears that anti-war activity soon became dominated by left-liberal campaigners, of whom someone wrote in *Echanges* [45] 66/67:

"They have brought their experiences with a vengeance into the new movement by demanding compromise with the status quo ideology and calling for protest within the context of peaceful obedience to the authorities so as to gain their respect. Many urge 'working through the system'. They tell us we must put pressure on elected representatives.....we must elect better representatives.....They urge that we 'support our troops', not hurt their feelings by criticising the job they do, and that we should express patriotism while criticising government policy. We must prove that we deserve to be listened to by obeying the rule of law and order, and by respecting the police".

This strategy of constitutional protest was an absolute failure. The attempt to base the opposition to the war on an alternative interpretation of the interests of US capital, and thus exploit the divisions which emerged within the US capitalist class, meant that Bush was given a free hand once Congress had voted in favour of military action and the bourgeoisie buried its differences and rallied to his support. The failure of the anti-war movement to root itself in a class opposition to the interests for which the war was to be fought can be measured by the overwhelming support for the war registered in opinion polls, even allowing for their notorious unreliability.

Here in Britain the anti-war movement registered its disapproval of the government's policy towards the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and, as in the US, sought to do so peacefully and constitutionally. Of course the anti-war movement was not a homogeneous mass, and contained within it many different perspectives united in their opposition to the war, many of which were fiercely critical of the **CND**/Tony Benn leadership. But the anti-war movement remained within the parameters set out by this leadership. These parameters derived from their political perspectives. They accepted the pre-supposition of a national interest. They accepted the legitimacy of the United Nations. They accepted the 'need' to re-establish the Kuwaiti regime's control over Kuwaiti oil. Their opposition to the war was thus based on a difference of opinion on how to achieve the goals of US/UK capital; they even advocated the pursuit of these goals by starving the Iraqi working class through sanctions.

As a result the anti-war leadership would never have countenanced the actions required for an effective opposition to the war. They wanted no repeats of the 1956 street battles in Whitehall against British intervention in Suez, a possibility they were only too aware of following the momentous re-emergence of class violence in Trafalgar Square only a few months before the Gulf crisis. The grip that the leadership maintained on the anti-war movement meant that it amounted to nothing more than a few peaceful marches to Hyde Park where any anger could be safely dissipated. No action was taken which challenged the authority of the state or undermined its ability to wage the war. The movement was confined to peaceful protest while the state was engaged in the mass slaughter of Iraqis.

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[44] *BM Combustion* , London WC1N 3XX.
Counter-Information (quarterly bulletin), Pigeonhole CI, c/o 11 Forth St., Edinburgh EH1, Scotland.
War Report , c/o New Statesman and Society, Foundation House, 38 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DQ.
It should be noted in passing however that the international circulation of counter-information and it's dissemination could have been much more efficient. Hopefully the developing European Counter Network will facilitate a more rapid and co-ordinated circulation of struggles; see *London Notes* for more info on the ECN.
London Notes , c/o Box LN, 121 Railton Road, Brixton, London, SE 24.

[45] *Echanges et Mouvement* , BM Box 91, London WC1N 3XX.

We have not yet answered the question, however, as to how it was that the forces of pacifism and social democracy were able to contain the anti-war movement. It is not within the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive answer to this question, comprising as it would not only a critique of Trotskyism and anarchism, but also discussions of the psyche of the British working class and its experiences of wars. But we can start to answer the question by undertaking a critique of one group that should have mounted a challenge to the leadership of the anti-war movement: **No War But the Class War.**

No War But The Class War

NWBTCW was a loose collection of revolutionaries who came together in opposition to the Gulf War. As they clearly pointed out in their leaflets, their opposition to the war was firmly rooted in a class-analysis rather than some form of moralistic liberalism."**We won't pay for the bosses war**" was the headline on a leaflet distributed during the prelude to the war. "**As in all bosses' wars, it's us who will be told to kill each other and die in the battlefields while those with most to gain from the war sit at home and count their profits**" it continued. As well as providing the cannon fodder, "**those of us not in the front line will have to pay in other ways.....it's us who will be told to tighten our belts and put up with cuts in jobs and wages.**"

NWBTCW also seemed to know what would be required for an effective opposition to the war: "**Only escalating the class war can prevent the massacres of both war and peace. Strikes such as those by oil workers can not only make working conditions safer but can sabotage the national economy, making it harder to wage war. Struggles like that against the poll tax can also undermine national mobilisation towards war. Others can sabotage the war machine directly**".

For various reasons however, **NWBTCW** limited itself to positing the class war ideally. Few, if any, steps were made towards actually realising it in practice. As *Workers Scud* [46] pointed out, "**a call for general class struggle opposition to the war became an emotional cushion**". How and why this came to be will hopefully become clearer as we follow the evolution of **NWBTCW** through the unfolding of the Gulf War.

Resisting the build-up to War:

Following the commencement of Operation Desert Shield in August 1990 **NWBTCW** was formed at a meeting in London to discuss ways of mounting an effective opposition to the war. Amongst those present were representatives from **Hackney Solidarity Group, Anarchist Communist Federation, Class War, Anarchist Workers Group, Wildcat** and assorted individuals including one of us from Brighton.

A proposal on the agenda was that we begin to organise a demonstration outside one of the major oil company offices in London. But rather than discussing this and other suitable actions the meeting soon became focussed on the fact that the **AWG** had adopted the Trotskyist line of supporting an Iraqi victory in the war. Their argument that they supported the Iraqi state militarily but not politically cut no ice with the rest of those present who pointed out that an Iraqi military success, in itself a virtual impossibility, could only be pursued by the imposition of military discipline on the Iraqi working class: suppressing the class struggle, shooting deserters and communists, torturing those who actively opposed the war etc.

The **AWG** were quite rightly expelled from the group. Had they not been there would have been endless problems over basic positions to be conveyed in the group's propaganda. With the rest of those present in agreement over the need to escalate the class struggle against the war in solidarity with the working class of Iraq, rather than implying that they should forsake their own struggle, the expulsion of the **AWG** *should* have allowed **NWBTCW** to press ahead with organising effective actions to sabotage the war effort. But as time went on it became clear that the meeting, and the argument with the **AWG**, had a different effect on those present. **NWBTCW** in many respects came to see its role as one of defending a class position on the war, rather than having a class position as a necessary but (in itself) insufficient prerequisite for taking practical steps to stop the war. Its concern with defining itself primarily against the position adopted by the various Trotskyist sects seemed to be at the expense of a practical challenge to the boundaries of peaceful constitutional protest imposed by the Benn/**CND** leadership.

Let us examine exactly how it was that this failure became manifested. Following the meeting the various groups and individuals involved threw themselves into the task of escalating the class struggle in order to undermine the

[46] *Workers Scud* , 40p plus postage, Box 15, 138 Kingsland High Road, London E8 2NS.

mobilisation towards war. But rather than attempt this squarely on the terrain of anti-war resistance, as had been originally proposed, efforts were directed almost exclusively towards the on-going struggle against the poll tax.

Those of us in Brighton also directed our attention towards the struggle against the poll tax, and the important associated work of supporting poll tax prisoners. But the neglect of anti-war activity itself in the hope that confrontation with the state over the poll tax would be sufficient to counter the movement towards war must now be seen to have been a major mistake. It is obvious now, and indeed was clear at the time with the ditching of Thatcher, that the state was attempting to conduct a tactical retreat over the poll tax. Our attempt to turn their tactical retreat into a rout, and thus create a political climate in which the state would find it increasingly difficult to pursue the war was well intentioned, but there turned out to be no real practical way of pressing home our advantage and seeking out large-scale confrontations.

Only when the war actually began in January did the enormity of this tactical error become obvious. Not only had the rest of **NWBTCW** also devoted their practical energies towards other struggles like the poll tax, but any sort of organisational work in preparation for the outbreak of the war had been entirely neglected. No plans had been laid for an immediate response to the start of the war such as a demo or an occupation. No efforts seem to have been made to make contacts with other groups, such as those who had been involved in **Cruisewatch** and the like, who would be prepared to take some form of direct action against the war. There was not even a decent network for communication between and throughout the various organisations and individuals who had been involved in the initial meeting. This haphazard approach to organisation continued through the duration of the war and served to compound the earlier mistakes.

The War Begins.

As the pictures came through of the bombing of Baghdad, following the passing of the UN deadline for withdrawal, many people were filled with horror and suddenly became aware of the urgency of the situation. In Brighton there were spontaneous demonstrations, and in London anti-war protesters converged on Trafalgar Square. But it soon became blindingly obvious that the neglect of planning of any sort of autonomous direct action had proved costly. The **CND** network had already established itself as the focus for opposition to the war. The fact that we could not immediately provide any alternative focus for opposition to the war, a focus that would have been capable of developing increasingly effective tactics and drawing in ever-larger numbers, as the town hall riots had done with the poll tax struggle, meant that we had to start from scratch and begin by operating *within* the movement as it had become constituted under the guise of Tony Benn and **CND**. We had to find ways of starting from within the movement and carrying people beyond the boundaries set out by the leadership.

Not only had organisational matters been so neglected that we found ourselves in this position, but it soon transpired that **NWBTCW** was in a worse state than it had been in at the start. Meetings began but the venue was apparently switched a number of times without keeping people informed, and so it seems that many of the original participants were thereby excluded. Sectarianism or stupidity? Worse still, the person who had the contact list disappeared for most of the duration of the war, making coordinating and communication matters even more difficult. Indeed, we in Brighton did not receive any mailouts whatsoever from **NWBTCW**, despite providing a contact address at the inaugural meeting and making subsequent requests to be kept in touch.

This haphazard approach to organisation may now, however, be seen as symptomatic of the shift in the group's *raison d'etre*: The narrowed base was even less adequate for putting practical proposals into action, but was perfectly capable of putting together leaflets outlining the group's position and calling for escalated class struggle.

Here in Brighton we belatedly began to take action to sabotage the war effort. The local **Committee to Stop the War in the Gulf**, dominated by pacifists and supported by the **SWP,** had reduced anti-war resistance to "peace vigils", standing peacefully and if possible silently around a statue in the middle of town. Not surprisingly this inspired no one and went unnoticed by everyone. But a blockade/picket of the Territorial Army HQ was organised and attended by the NVDA elements in the peace movement, by hunt saboteurs, squatters and the members of **Sussex Poll Tax Resisters**. This was far more inspiring for those involved, spilling over into scuffles and forcing the TA to ring for the police, a van-load of whom arrived as we were leaving. A shame it had not been got together earlier as this type of action contained the seeds which could have grown into mass civil disorder.

There were various other low-key autonomous direct actions around the country, ranging from putting in the windows of Army Recruitment offices to occupying the toll booths of the Severn Bridge. But a national focus was

needed, by neccessity in London, and all that was happening were the peaceful marches to Hyde Park, largely ignored by the media.

NWBTCW distributed a leaflet on the demonstration following the outbreak of the war entitled **"Sabotage the War Effort!"** Following a brief outline of mutinies in WW1, Vietnam and the Iran-Iraq war, it continued: **"The war can and must be opposed on the home front as well as in the armed forces"**, and cited the attacks on munitions trains in Europe and the burning of a cop car and blocking of the bridge in San Francisco. Then it urged that **"We can also refuse to pay for the war in any way by resisting attacks on our living standards- by carrying on refusing to pay the poll tax and other bills, by striking for more pay, by opposing cuts."** **NWBTCW** wanted to keep the home fires burning, but evidently this was to take place away from the demos and over issues only indirectly related to the war. They had made no plans to try to make the demonstrations we were on anything other than peaceful and inconsequential.

On discovering a few days before the next national demonstration that **NWBTCW** had not worked out any practical initiatives for it, we desperately tried to figure out a way of stirring up some serious disorder on it. But attempts to find out the route of the march were fruitless, so we were unable to work out any potential targets for a lightning occupation, impromptu picket or well placed brick. So on the day before the demonstration we were forced to settle for producing a leaflet which we hoped might fire the imaginations of the demonstrators, particularly those grouped around **NWBTCW**. Under the heading "**Class War Against The Oil War**" and an introduction it declared:

"Already nearly 50% of the population opposes the war, but so far this massive opposition has remained largely passive. It will only succeed when it actively confronts the forces for war and once it goes beyond the boundaries, set out by CND and its friends, of peaceful constitutional 'protest'.....With much of the opposition to this war being censored by the mass media it is vital that we make our presence felt. It was a glimpse of our anger on the 31st of March last year that contributed to the downfall of Thatcher. Today we must show that anger again. We must refuse the state's right to define the nature of this demonstration. While they ask us to march peacefully between police lines they are murdering men, women and children."

Fighting talk is never enough, of course, so the reverse of the leaflet showed a suggestive map of central London locating the following buildings: the American Embassy, Shell Mex House, Esso House, Texaco HQ, Mobil Oil HQ, Vickers HQ, The Admiralty and the MOD. As it turned out the demonstration avoided all of these potential targets, only passing near to the American Embassy which was so heavily protected by police that it would have been the least desirable of them all. Still, we hoped that the leaflet might force **NWBTCW** to work something out for the next time. Just in case, however, we decided that we should formulate a concrete proposal of our own and attend the next **NWBTCW** meeting, to take place a week before the next national demonstration.

Just before the next meeting the Allied forces finally launched their ground offensive to retake Kuwait. The bombing campaign had continued for weeks, destroying residential areas, sewage plants, hospitals and other civilian as well as military targets, and now they were going to move in for the kill. We were all expecting to see the body bags donated by DuPont bringing the corpses back for burial. Once again we were filled with anger and a renewed sense of urgency. But at the **NWBTCW** meeting the discussion was primarily concerned with the necessary, but still insufficient, organisation of public meetings against the war and how to deal with Trotskyist hecklers. Then we put forward our proposal, and to the credit of those present, the urgency of the situation and the need to respond *decisively* was accepted.

We were to:

i) Mobilise our forces as best as possible. All **NWBTCW** contacts and virtually every anarchist group in the country were to be informed of a meeting point near the main demo at which they were to converge at a specified time. It was to be made clear that we would move off immediately to take some unspecified form of direct action.

ii) Conduct a lightning occupation of Shell Mex House, only a few hundred yards from the main assembly point and with no visible means to prevent our access.

iii) Send others off to inform the gathering demonstrators of the occupation and pursuade many as possible to join us or help defend the occupation with a mass picket in The Strand.

iv) See how the situation evolved and respond accordingly.

We shall never know whether the plan would have worked in practice. It may have failed , or it may have been the moment at which the anti-war movement launched itself beyond its previous limits never to return. But we did not find out, for between the notification of contacts and the day of the demonstration the war was ended by the mass desertion of the Iraqi conscript army. The demonstration itself was small and dejected. But worse still, virtually no-one turned up at the secret assembly point aside from ourselves. It was a missed opportunity, for the first reports were already coming through of the heroic uprisings in southern Iraq; we could have at least discussed possible solidarity actions had there been enough of us[47]. As it was those present were simply demoralised by the failure of others, and the rest of **NWBTCW** in particular, to turn up.

Conclusions

We made some serious tactical errors during our campaign against the Gulf War. We pinned our hopes on the anti-poll tax struggle, and left too much of the responsibility of organising autonomous resistance to the war to comrades in London. We have acknowledged our mistakes however, believing that self-criticism is an essential moment of revolutionary praxis. In printing this article we hope to contribute to a similar process of self-criticism amongst others involved in **NWBTCW**, who will know much more about what actually happened within the group than us. This article should also help others who were not directly involved to learn from our mistakes.

To be fair to **NWBTCW,** no-one anticipated that the war would be over so quickly; we all underestimated the potential for revolt of the Iraqi army. Had the war continued and the corpses and wounded started arriving in Britain then **NWBTCW** may well have been in the front line of agitation against the closure of NHS wards for the war effort. And the anti-war movement may well have been galvanised by the deaths of British troops in a way it wasn't by the slaughter of Iraqi civilians. But **NWBTCW** must acknowledge that it failed consistently over a period of six months to do what was so desperately required. Various practical suggestions were made by various members, but were not put into practice. Not, it would seem, because other proposals were deemed to be more effective, but because the group was ultimately content to defend the right position, the historic class position in all its purity.

In other words, the **NWBTCW** group seems to have seen its role as a predominantly ideological one. The truly internationalist position had to be broadcast to the movement and the Trots had to be denounced or attacked, leaving the grip of social democracy and pacifism intact. Even when the **CND**/Benn leadership were threatening the **RCP** with the police because they refused to toe the patriotic line, **NWBTCW** were more concerned with getting into fisticuffs with the **RCP** than challenging **CND**'s complicity with the state. For many years positions regarding the nature of the Soviet Union have served as the 'litmus test' for determining the 'authenticity' of groups within the British left that have claimed to be revolutionary. Was it the collapse of the Soviet Union and the declining relevance of these arguments that led to members of **NWBTCW** becoming preoccupied with distinguishing themselves from the rest of the ('always counter-revolutionary') Left?

We cannot do anything to change what happened during the Gulf War but we can learn from our mistakes. And with it looking increasingly likely that the British state will be involved in a joint attempt to intervene militarily in Yugoslavia, to ensure that the carve-up goes along the lines desired by German capital, we must be ready to make sure that they cannot get away with their bloody crusades so easily again

K.E.

[47] Eds' note: Whilst we still know relatively little about the Shi'ite uprisings in Southern Iraq, the proletarian nature of the Kurdish uprising and the assistance given to the Ba'athist regime's crushing of it by the Allies and Kurdish nationalists have since been documented. See "Ten Days That Shook Iraq- Inside Information From An Uprising", available from *Aufheben* for a SAE.
A much more detailed account, including an appendix on the Kurdistan Workers Councils or 'Shoras' is available for 65p from *BM Blob and Combustion* , London WC1N 3XX.

Some Critical Notes on Earth First! from Within

Editors' Introduction

Growing impatience and disillusionment with the reformist and elitist methods of organisations such as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and the Green Party is leading many on the radical fringes of the Green movement to look towards a more direct action orientated politics. This search for a new political orientation has resulted in the emergence Earth First!, which since it began in Britain little over two years ago has begun to grow into a significant radical force within the British Green Movement. Indeed, in the last six months Earth First! has begun to take off, with more than a dozen groups being established across the country. Earth First! groups have been at the forefront of organising demonstrations in Liverpool, Tilbury and Oxford against the import of tropical hardwoods, aswell as organising numerous local protests against the 'car economy' amongst other things and have already begun to gain a certain degree of noteriety within the national press.

However, while the direct action orientation of Earth First! is a welcome change from that of professional lobbying of mainstream ecology groups that see their grass roots supporters as simple fund raisers, the politics of Earth First! is, to say the least, confused. Earth First! originated in the USA and its import into the UK has brought with it a whole assortment of ideological baggage, much of which has little or no connection with political or social conditions in Britain.

We shall consider the crisis in the mainstream Green Movement and the politics of Earth First!, and their relevance to revolutionary politics in more detail in future issues of Aufheben. Here we publish an article written by a member of South Downs Earth First! that seeks to address the confusions in Earth First!'s politics as they have become manifest in the campaign against the M3 extention at Twyford Down. This article was originally written for the the Earth First! newsletter Action Update but was never published (whether this was because it was deemed 'too long', too theoretical,politically unacceptable or was simply lost (!) is unknown).

Lessons from Twyford Down so far

The extension of the M3 through Twyford Down has been Earth First!'s first opportunity in confronting the current motorway construction programme, which threatens to wreak further havoc in Britain's countryside and make room for even more of those noxious tin boxes that plague our cities and choke the air that we breath. However, apart from some unearned notoriety in the national press, Earth First!'s impact has, as yet, been far from impressive, a fact that demands that we take stock of our position - particularly with regards to other environmental groups.

Two other main groupings have been involved in opposing the M3 extension at Twyford Down. The first being the Twyford Down Association (TDA) which has organised the local opposition to this particular road scheme, the other being Friends of the Earth (FOE) which has opposed the M3 extension as part of its national anti-roads campaign. Let us consider the lessons from our relations to these two groupings in turn.

1)

The Twyford Down Association

Winchester is one of the richest cities in the UK. It seems doubtful that in this Tory heartland any more than a small minority have anything more than a superficial and sentimental attachment to the surrounding countryside, an attachment, when it comes down to it, that is easily outweighed by the wealth and conveniences they owe to the 'car economy'. What is more, it seems unlikely that anymore than a handful of the people of Winchester have any experience of political protests, let alone of radical political action.

In such unfavourable circumstances for the development of a large scale local opposition to the M3 extension the TDA have exploited their contacts in high places and opted for a strategy of influencing those with power and influence in the Government and the Tory Party. To some extent this strategy has proved remarkably successful. Not only have they won over the high pulpit of the establishment - the Times leader columns - along with the rest of the bourgeois press to their side, making the Twyford Down a national issue, they have also penetrated the labyrinths of Brussels and won the backing of the European Commissioner. But all this has been to no avail. The government has pressed on regardless.

In their desperation at the failure of their strategy of influencing the government the TDA has come to welcome support from almost any quarter, even from the 'great unwashed'. In doing so they have come to present themselves as all things to all people. Thus while they continue to work with FOE in winning over Tory MPs to the cause, they have also given vague encouragement to the ideas for green camps and Non-Violent Direct Action, albeit with certain provisos to keep it respectable for their friends in the bourgeois press.

We have been all too easily taken in by such encouragements. Flattered at the prospects of being invited to offer our 'precious NVDA skills' to the 'hundred or so locals prepared to lay themselves on the line', we were then surprised when we found that such locals did not exist!

While it is very important to consider the 'locals' in opposing motorway construction in rural areas, it is important to remember that Britain does not have a rural population of any size, particularly not in southern England. Only 1% of the workforce works on the land - these being mainly wage-labourers. Unlike most countries on the continent which have considerable numbers of small-holders and small farmers, which in the past have provided the basis for mass local opposition to anti-environmental projects in rural areas (such as the construction of the nuclear power station at Wackersdorf), the vast majority of Britain's population have no direct attachment to or affinity with the land. Although many people live in country villages, most of such people now commute to nearby towns and cities for their work and shopping etc.

'Local' people cannot therefore be expected to have anymore affinity with the their local countryside than anyone else. Indeed, they may have less affinity than those, like most of ourselves, who need an escape from oppressive conditions of the towns and cities. Furthermore, in so far as they are rich or well off, as they mostly are in Winchester (although this will not always be the case in rural areas), they are likely to be conservative and ill inclined to taking or sanctioning radical action that may upset the status quo to which they owe their wealth. After all, if they build a few roads around Winchester they can always drive to Heathrow and take a few more holidays elsewhere if they want to 'enjoy some countryside'.

Thus while it is important to consider the feelings of the 'locals', we should not be to deferential to them. This then brings us to FOE.

2)

Friends of the Earth: Friends or Foe?

While for the TDA Twyford Down is the 'be all and end all', (and hence in the face of defeat the TDA were prepared to welcome Earth First!'s interest in the issue), for FOE (and by FOE we mean the leadership of Friends of the Earth) Twyford Down is merely one battle in the long war against the motorway construction programme. A war in which they can point to victories as well as defeats. As they have made all too clear to us, unlike the TDA, they do not welcome Earth First!'s involvement in this issue. For them direct action beyond the most limited token civil disobedience can only serve to ruin the years of hard work they have put in lobbying the 'powers that be'. For them the only viable strategy is to win over public opinion as expressed by the mainstream bourgeois press so as to place political pressure on the government to change its plans. Ultimately for them, only by making the government

believe that each and every road scheme is an electoral liability will the road programme be abandoned. Confrontation and direct action for FOE can only alienate the formers of public opinion and thus the electorate. For FOE such actions are therefore worse than useless.

Our responses to such arguments have been, to say the least, a little pathetic and betray a failure to work through our commitment to direct action. FOE are correct in seeing Twyford Down as one battle in a long war against the motorway construction programme, a battle that may well be lost. Furthermore, they struck very close to home when, in attacking Earth First!'s fetishism for 'Monkey Wrenching', they accused us of being a 'one tactic organisation'! Simply denying these criticisms leaves us as little more than romantic utopians prepared to make a heroic, if futile, defence of Twyford Down at whatever the cost and regardless of the consequences.

Nor is it adequate to plead that Earth First! helps FOE by making them appear more moderate and hence we are really FOE's best friends. As professional lobbyists FOE are better placed than anybody to know that their strategy of influence and reasoned arguments can only be ruined by direct action and political confrontation within the broader environmental movement however much they would seek to 'publicly disassociate' themselves from it. FOE would only be listened too as 'moderates' if they promised to be a means of defusing a militant environmental movement that was seriously challenging the state, a situation very far from the present reality in the UK, and one in which FOE would not be our friends but more of a Trojan Horse!

The underlying problem with FOE's arguments is not, as some in Earth First! may have it, that they are too 'human orientated' and fail to recognise the 'equal rights of all life to survival'. On the contrary, by making a stand on defending Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) for example, they set out from the moral imperative of defending the right of rare and endangered species of flora and fauna to survive, however much they then seek to dress this up as a question of 'science' to make it palatable to the decision makers. FOE's error is that they do not understand that the underlying problem is the problem of the existing organisation of human society: to be specific, they do not have a critique of capitalism and democracy! For them the road programme is simply due to the political influence of the road lobby on government decision making; an influence which they then simply have to counter through the force of public opinion. They fail to see the fundamental importance of the car economy to the very existence of the state.

To put it simply, the car industry has been the linchpin of capital accumulation since the Second World War; it has been the key industry in what has become known as the 'Fordist Mode of Accumulation'. If Britain is to be a place where profit can be made and capital accumulated, if Britain is to compete of the world capitalist market, then it 'needs an efficient infra-structure' and this means more roads and motorways. This is the overriding imperative that shapes government policy.

The role of the democratic process, of which FOE are an integral part, is not to determine whether the 'public' wants more roads, but rather how and when roads can be built with the minimum of popular opposition. In this light FOE's democratic methods may be able to win the odd battle but they can never win the war! The only way of halting the road construction programme is to develop mass opposition that through direct action and political confrontation with the forces of the state threaten the very basis of the 'car economy'.

Hence, while we must respect the work FOE do in gathering information etc, and while it will be necessary to work with them from time to time, we should have no illusions about them. Ultimately, when the crunch comes, they will be on the other side.

3)

Conclusion

If nothing else our involvement in Twyford Down should teach us that it is not enough to be the specialists of Direct Action or 'Monkey Wrenching'. We have to place Direct Action within a coherent political project and for such a project we have to have a coherent critique of capitalist society. It is not enough to simply import uncritically half-baked notions from our sister organisation in the USA, we have to develop such a critique ourselves from our own experiences.

NB Since this article was written in March further actions at Twyford Down have occurred. Following a demonstration organised by the TDA in May more than a hundred people occupied the building site at the SSSI on the 'Water Meadows' and were able to flood the workings by opening a sluice gate causing a significant delay to the construction work. Since then a small green camp has been established that has maintained a continuous oppositional presence to building work.

REVIEWS

FASCISM/ANTIFASCISM

"Fascism/Antifascism" by Jean Barrot. Black Cat Press, Edmonton (1982). Reproduced by Unpopular Books, Box 15, 138 Kingsland High Road, London E8.

This text first appeared in 1979 as part of an introduction to a collection of writings by Italian left communists (Bordigans) on the Spanish Civil War. Although not recent, the pamphlet is being reviewed here as it concerns a contemporary issue: the relation of antifascism to the class struggle. Half the text is taken up with historical examples (Italy, Germany, Chile, Portugal, Spain, Russia, the Paris Commune, Mexico). Space does not allow discussion of these cases here. Instead, the focus will be on the general argument put forward by Barrot.

The translator's introduction sums up the argument's weaknesses (which, it is suggested, are the weaknesses of Left communism itself) as follows: dogmatic Marxism, positivist economics, obsolete class analyses and contempt for the working class. It is the last of these which is the most important limitation of Barrot's case. The strength of his case, however, is its clear-sighted and consistently uncompromising attack on the state, "an instrument of class domination", which most leftists still propose to treat as neutral and thus to "use". This theme saturates Barrot's argument.

Barrot's thesis is very simple; it is that struggling against fascism (in particular) necessarily entails supporting democracy, that capitalism will necessarily remain intact if antifascists support one of its forms against another. All manifestations of antifascism ultimately strengthen the democratic state at the expense of the class struggle; thus both fascism and its nemesis antifascism lead to totalitarianism (the strong state) not communism. Dictatorship, says Barrot, is not a weapon of capital but a *tendency* of capital.

But while criticizing antifascists for allegedly supporting democracy, Barrot also asks: "do we have a CHOICE? Democracy will transform itself into dictatorship as soon as is necessary ... The political forms which capital gives itself do not depend on the action of the working class any more than they depend on the intentions of the bourgeoisie." (p. 8).

Barrot is clearly emphasizing the logic of the capitalist state at the expense of the counter-logic of the proletariat. The picture he paints is of a highly successful capitalist state continually beating the working class to the first punch so that the latter are often duped ultimately into supporting rather than overthrowing the state. Given this, it is no wonder that many of the struggles the working class engage in (such as the fight against fascism) are at best futile and at worst counterproductive; the working class themselves may merely be contributing to the state's tendency to totalitarianism.

But if we abandon the assumptions, first, that it is the state (capital) that always moves first (with the proletariat as hapless respondants), and, second, that antifascism is a homogeneous phenomenon that, by its very *nature,* takes the side of the democratic state, we get quite a different picture of this particular arena of struggle. Before exploring alternative perspectives on antifascism, however, it is only fair to measure Barrot's account against current antifascist groups.

For example, the Bennite view (which partly informs the ethos of the Anti-Nazi League) is that "we" (on the left, broadly conceived) should forget our differences and concentrate on fighting the fascists (implicitly: we should unite around the lowest common denominator and vote Labour). This argument is based in part on the claim that the reason for the rise of Hitler was that the KPD and SPD (social democrats and communists) were fighting each other

instead of the fascists. But Barrot points out that the left wing forces (fighting each other) were not defeated by the Nazis; rather, the proletarian defeat had already taken place when the fascist repression occurred; the revolutionaries were defeated not by fascism but by *democracy*. The Anti-Nazi League are also criticized (by the Revolutionary Communist Party, for example) for trying to build a mass movement around the issue of Nazis and fascists, when it is the (non-fascist and anti-Nazi) racists in power who are the main problem for (the non-white) working class of Britain. The word "Nazi" is emotive, so it is easy for people to agree to oppose "Nazism" while they may continue to condone racism and patriotism. Similarly, at a recent anti-fascist/anti-Nazi public meeting, I was dismayed to hear a speaker from Anti-Fascist Action criticize fascists on the grounds that they did not really support "our" country (implying that patriotism - supporting "our" bourgeoisie - is desirable).

In these examples we can see how Barrot has pointed accurately to problems of typical antifascist positions; there is a clear tendency to oppose fascism on the grounds that it is undemocratic and a threat to "our" country. In such cases we are in effect, as Barrot says, being asked to rally to the support of one manifestation of the state against another. A classic example is the case of the Spanish Civil War, in which the anarchist strategy for fighting fascism was to join forces with the republican government.

However, it is not enough to dismiss all the various contemporary antifascist manifestations on these grounds alone. The point is that many people become involved in antifascism *not* to support democracy but simply because they recognize the need to organize specifically against the BNP and similar groups who intimidate minorities, and against racist attacks in general. The issue of *racism* is not addressed by Barrot in this pamphlet. In his defence, it is worth stating that fascism and racism are by no means synonymous (conceptually or historically); racism is simply a contingent tool of fascism and other forms of capitalism. But racism is most people's experience of present day neo-fascism; fascism has almost become a theoretical justification for racism in many cases.

Barrot's argument is directed at those who are exclusively fighting fascism; but he also refers to struggles in Italy that were antifascist without being "specifically antifascist: to struggle against Capital meant to struggle against fascism as well as against parliamentary *democracy*." (p. 13). In other words, *not all* antifascist activity entails supporting democracy. The knub of the argument is this, however: the state transforms itself to suit capital, thus "[t]he proletariat will destroy totalitarianism [including fascism] only by destroying democracy and all political forms at the same time." (p. 17). Barrot presents us with a sharp dichotomy in which anything less than his pre-defined programme for revolution (the attack on wage labour) is worse than useless. While we would of course endorse an all-out attack on wage labour, and while we reserve the right to criticize the recent wave of antifascist groups, it is a necessary part of our support for one class against the other that we confront all forces which attempt to divide us along lines of "race", nationality etc. Barrot's pamphlet is important in that it warns us against the dangers of involvement in popular fronts; but it should not be taken as providing a theoretical justification for ignoring the concrete problems which affect particular sections of our class.

Below left: Appeal to peasants not to sell their produce on the free (black) market but through the government co-operatives.
Below centre: 'Defend small property. Capital punishment for thieves.'
Below right: 'To intensify production is to work for the revolution'; published in Barcelona during the Catalan 'battle of the eggs' campaign.

Aufheben

(past tense: *hob auf* ; p.p. *aufgehoben* ; noun: *Aufhebung*).

Aufheben has no English equivalent . In popular German it"normally has two main meanings which are in opposition. One is negative, "to abolish", "to annul", "to cancel" etc. The other is positive, "to supersede", "to transcend". Hegel exploited this duality of meaning and used the word to describe the positive-negative action whereby a higher form of thought or nature supersedes a lower form, while at the same time 'preserving' its 'moments of truth'.The proletariat's revolutionary negation of capitalism, communism, is an instance of this positive-negative movement of supersession, as is its theoretical realisation in Marx's method of critique.

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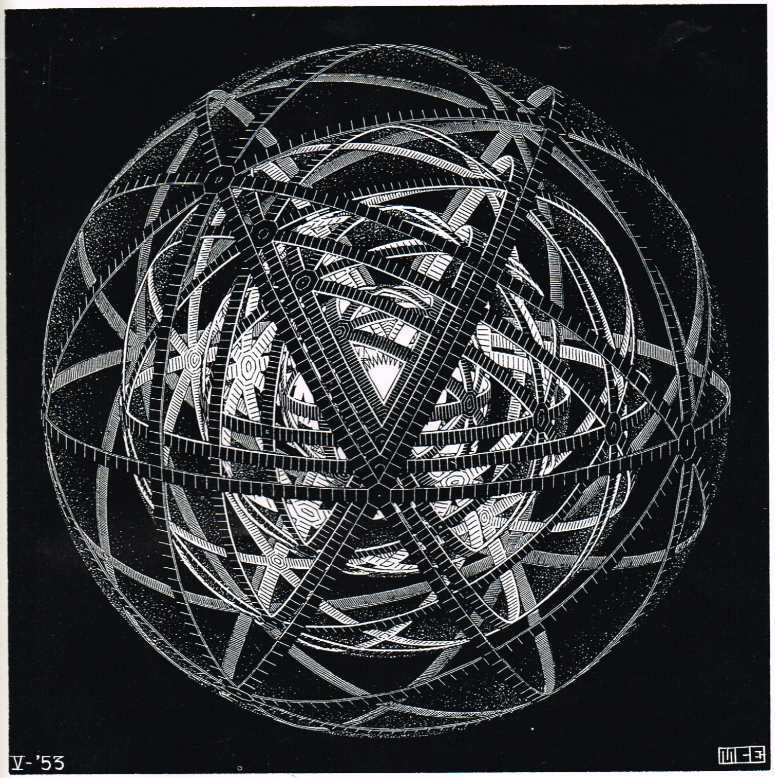

Thanks to Clydeside Press & AK Distribution

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